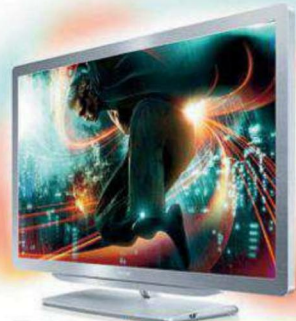


HOME CINEMA

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First look
Philips' Moth Eye
3D LED TV, p50

2012 & Beyond

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3D goes large

Samsung's 64in
plasma rated



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Should you buy
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THE HANGOVER
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& MORE...

Hi-def hero

Sony ITB Freeview+HD PVR

The movies that Blu-ray forgot

From Jaws to Chinatown, we write our HD wishlist

DIY cinema

The final stage
of our 7.2 build



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03

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dabs.com

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www.homecinemachoice.com

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Future of AV, p16



WELCOME

Imagining a home cinema of the future should be easy, shouldn't it? Well, that's what we thought when we embarked on this issue's spot of crystal-ball gazing. Yet it soon became clear that **no one in the AV industry is exactly sure how technology will develop.** While some are confident that film downloads



will take off, others say there's still life in DVD. And while 4K will mean the return of supersize TVs, will they be OLED, LCD, plasma, or something else?

What is certain at the start of 2012 is that Blu-ray remains the ultimate format for enjoying movies – and that's why this issue we've named and shamed the blistering blockbusters that, for one reason or another, just aren't available in HD. Blu-ray has now been around almost six years – hopefully we won't have to wait just as long before we can add these to our collections...

Mark Craven
Deputy Editor



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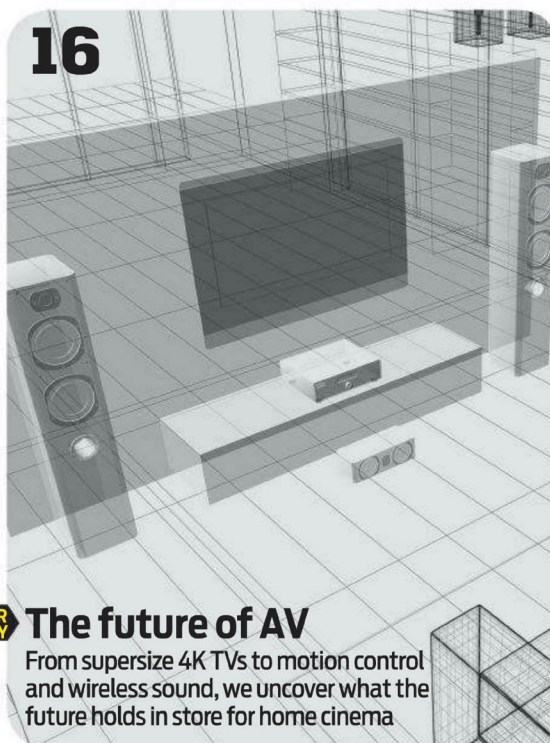
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COVER STORY

The future of AV

From supersize 4K TVs to motion control and wireless sound, we uncover what the future holds in store for home cinema

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Steve May:

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John Archer:

The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



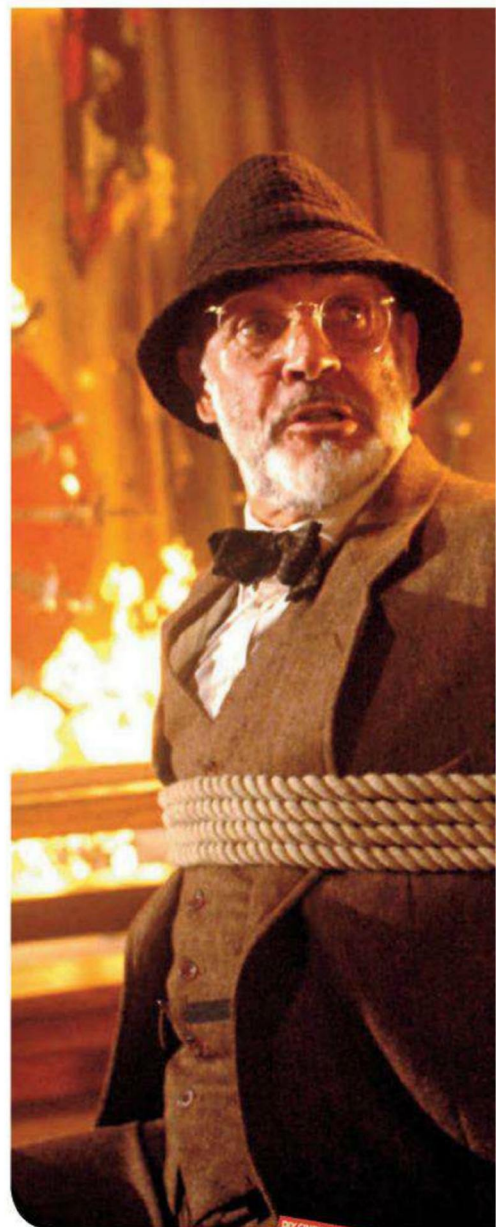
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Adrian Justins:

Made his name as the editor of *What Video & TV* and *What Home Cinema*



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The movies that Blu-ray forgot

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From *Indiana Jones* to *Barbarella* – we name and shame the blockbusters that you still can't buy on Blu-ray

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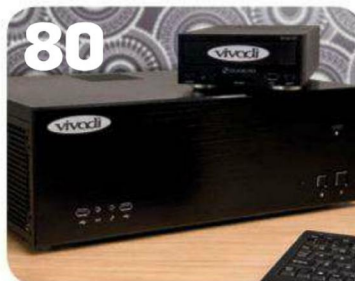
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BULLETIN

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SKY 3D New doc explores freaky critters **4K CINEMA** The truth behind Sony's remastering mission
APPLE TV Early rumours point to OLED tech and SIRI voice control **NEWS X10** Hot stories in bite-size chunks **GAME OF THRONES** Fantasy TV fare hits Blu-ray **AND MUCH MORE!**

Go to the Cinema

Paradigm Cinema speakers → www.anthemavs.co.uk



Paradigm has introduced a new range of speakers, dubbed 'Cinema', which employ sculpted cabinet designs and technology derived from its Reference Signature series. The lineup consists of the Cinema 100 Satellites (£300 for pair), the three-driver Cinema 200 LCR (£200), the five-driver Cinema 400 LCR (£350), the seven-driver, three-channel Cinema Trio Soundbar (£500) and the Cinema Sub (£350). UK distributor Anthem AV Solutions is offering a complete Cinema 100 CT 5.1 system containing five Cinema 100 satellites and a Cinema Sub for £950. Look out for a review soon.

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3D big Bang

Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 7-40 3D
www.bang-olufsen.com

Premium AV brand Bang & Olufsen has introduced a new model to its BeoVision 7 TV lineup, adding an integrated 3D Blu-ray player to the 40in Full HD TV and accompanying digital surround module (with onboard DTS-HD MA decoding at last).

'3D functionality is in increasing demand right now,' claims senior product manager Ole Moltzen. 'The fact you can select a solution where the 3D Blu-ray player is built-in is rather unique and Bang & Olufsen is one of the few companies in the world who offer that.'

The £7,600 price-tag ensures that this stylish 3DTV doesn't come cheap. But it wouldn't be a Bang & Olufsen product if it did.

Partner with...

Sony PlayStation Vita
Next-gen portable console
£230/280 approx



Sony is getting ready to reinvent portable gaming with the UK release of the PS Vita on February 22. Available in both Wi-Fi + 3G (£280) and Wi-Fi only (£230) incarnations, this handheld stunner boasts a 5in OLED screen and is powered by a 1.5Ghz ARM A9 quad-core processor. As well as games, buyers can also expect plenty of TV and film content made available to download through Sony's Entertainment Network. <http://uk.playstation.com>

Egg-cellent offer



It's a decade since Eclipse first arrived in the UK and introduced audiophiles across

the country to its distinctive egg-shaped Time Domain loudspeakers. To celebrate, the company is running a special 20 per cent discount over at authorised stockists on its 500 series speakers, stands and amplifier – for example, while the offer runs you can pick up the TD510 stand-mount monitor (pictured) for £1617 rather than £2,022, while the TD50111 Time Domain Amp will set you back £180 instead of £225. The offer runs until February 28. www.eclipse-td.net

Apple TV teased



Apple's assault on the TV market is picking up pace, with news breaking that Apple big-wigs have met with major media companies to discuss the forthcoming tech. Media executives have told reporters that Apple's plans apparently include the use of super high-definition 55in screens supplied by Sharp and a major focus on AirPlay functionality, allowing users to seamlessly move content from the TV to a phone or tablet and back again. Unsurprisingly, Siri-style voice control has also been a major part of the discussions. www.apple.com

Picture perfect



Artcoustic promises that its new SL Range is more dynamic, more open, more accurate and powerful than any of its previous models. Available in a choice of 11 models, and measuring just 67mm deep, these stylish wall-hangers feature the company's proprietary horizontal and vertical Symmetrically Controlled Beamwidth Array, which it claims offers high sound pressure levels without a compression horn, very low distortion and low power consumption. Prices run from £700 to £1,700 per speaker depending on the model. www.artcoustic.com

Sony showcases 4K

Or: How we learned to stop worrying and love digital cinema

Following a sluggish start, the move from print to digital cinema projection has gathered significant speed in the past few years, particularly in the field of 4K projection. Yet, despite the success, digital cinema has also encountered plenty of criticism along the way.

Armed with its SRX-R320 4K projection technology, Sony Professional recently set about answering digital cinema's critics at Islington's Everyman Screen on the Green with the aid of a panel of experts. 'For the first time, every single customer will get to see the film as it was originally shot. There's no degradation,' stated Sony Professional's SVP, Digital Cinema, David McIntosh, about the key advantage of 4K digital cinema offers. He then boldly claimed: 'I simply don't believe there's anywhere to go after 4K'.

Seduced by power

HCC was treated to a series of comparative demos by Sony Pictures' Grover Crisp (EVP Asset Management, Film Restoration & Digital Mastering), including 4K stills from the upcoming restoration of *Lawrence of Arabia*. But the biggest surprise came from a comparison between a sequence from the 4K digital presentation of *Dr. Strangelove* and the same scene from a 35mm print.



Expert panel (l-r): Everyman CEO Andrew Meyers and Park Circus MD Nic Varley join Grover Crisp and David McIntosh

'Kubrick struggled for decades trying to get the film to look the way he wanted, but wasn't able to due to the loss of the original negatives,' revealed Crisp. 'However, we were able to change the contrast and density in the digital environment and still get as much detail as we can out of it'.

But what about the argument that digital can never look like a film print? 'We can create digital cinema presentations of films from any era and still have them look like the best print from that era,' states Crisp. And while he concedes that people are 'seduced' by the 'power of the tools' available, resulting in 'over-processed digital restorations', the blame should not be laid at the feet of digital cinema itself.

A subsequent 4K digital cinema screening of *Dr. Strangelove* proved Crisp's point perfectly – leaving every attendee waiting with breath for the day when 4K becomes the standard for home cinemas, not just public ones.

Strangelove: The film's 4K master was also used for the BD

Playlist...

Team HCC reveals its Playback picks of the last month

Captain America: The First Avenger (All-region BD)

Cutting-edge SFX combine with old-school thrills in this superhero stunner.



Star Wars: The Complete Saga (All-region BD)



We've been waiting for this for years, so it's hardly surprising that we keep watching it over and over again. Home cinema heaven.

Batman: Arkham City (Xbox 360)



The year's best game and the closest you'll ever get to feeling like the Dark Knight without dressing in spandex.

Transformers: Dark of the Moon (All-region BD)



Not the entire film. But the freeway chase and final assault on Chicago are such great demo sequences it's hard to stop dipping in from time to time.

Helldriver (Region B BD)



Yoshihiro Nishimura's latest demented, ultra-gory epic pits a sword-swinging schoolgirl against the living dead.

Talkback

Team HCC discusses the pros and cons of UltraViolet...



Ever since it was first announced, I've had a bit of a soft spot for UltraViolet – anything that will annoy movie pirates is good in my book. Subsequently, I'm saddened that the service has got off to a less-than-spectacular launch in the US. However, it's important to remember that these are early days for the DECE – and hopefully the teething troubles will disappear once UltraViolet-compatible hardware becomes available. Lastly, if I was in the DECE, I wouldn't worry about Apple's lack of involvement – not everything in the world needs to be 'i'-driven. **MC**



While I completely understand the appeal of a Digital Copy, as a home cinema enthusiast I simply can't see myself ever making use of one.

Cinema is all about bigscreen entertainment – the idea of having to watch a movie on a tiny screen just fills me with dread. It's bad enough when I visit my parents and am stuck watching films on their 32in TV, but the thought of watching a movie on a laptop or (shudder) mobile phone, with no surround sound? No thanks! I'll stick to reading when I'm on the go, and save the movies for my home cinema if it's all the same to you. **AvB**

UltraViolet launches at last

But technical glitches leave US consumers feeling ultra-violent

Almost a year since we first wrote about it, the UltraViolet digital rights library system has finally become a reality. But it's safe to say that UltraViolet hasn't exactly met with the warm reception from consumers that the DECE (Digital Entertainment Content Ecosystem) consortium was banking on if its revolutionary approach to managing digital rights is to become the *de facto* standard for the industry.

Warner Home Video's US Blu-ray release of *Horrible Bosses* last October was the world's first title to be accompanied by an UltraViolet Digital Copy, swiftly followed by the likes of *Green Lantern* and Sony's *The Smurfs*. Here in the UK (the second market to get the service) it was left to Warner to once again take the lead with the UV-enabled Blu-ray release of *Final Destination 5* at the end of December. This means that at the time of writing the only feedback to date has come from US consumers, and it's there that the service has quickly come under fire from users.



Mark Teitell: 'The door is always open for Apple to join the DECE'

Internet forums quickly filled up with complaints about the service from US movie fans, citing both the lack of iTunes compatibility and technical problems with Flixter itself.

Reportedly, it got so bad that Warner eventually responded by issuing iTunes redemption codes to those whose complaints couldn't be resolved.

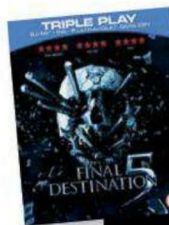
However, Mark Teitell, GM & Executive Director of DECE, maintains that it is 'important to distinguish between whether the iTunes store will participate in UltraViolet and whether consumers with Apple devices can use them with UltraViolet'. The answer to the latter should now be a resounding yes, thanks to the recent rollout of UltraViolet downloads to iPad/iPhone via Flixter's Apple iOS app – a development that will hopefully make for a much smoother launch here in the UK.



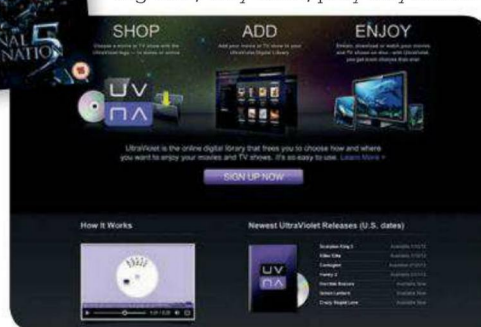
Consumer complaints

The concept behind the cloud-based UltraViolet is simplicity itself. It gives consumers the rights to watch movies and TV shows that they have purchased on any laptop or portable device. The theory is that eventually a consumer will be able to buy a film on Blu-ray (for example) and will automatically be given the rights to download and stream it wherever and whenever they want.

However, with none of its technology partners ready to launch compatible hardware yet, UltraViolet is limited to simply offering a Digital Copy redemption service via Flixter. And it's here that the initial problems started.



UltraViolet: Does it truly live up to the tag-line, 'Buy once, play anywhere'?



Infrared injection



HDanywhere's IR Over HDMI Injector Kit provides an affordable alternative to installing a

separate IR repeater system to overcome infrared line-of-sight issues. The £24 package features a HDMI plug/socket switchable transmitter, HDMI plug/socket switchable receiver, an IR transmitter and IR receiver, and utilises the CEC channel of your HDMI cabling to transmit the command. Obviously, the one downside to this method is that manufacturer-specific HDMI link/CEC protocols, etc cannot function at the same time.

www.hdanywhere.co.uk

Temporal turn-on



Take a trip into the future on February 27 with the UK Triple-Play Blu-ray and DVD release of

20th Century Fox's stylish new sci-fi thriller *In Time*. Directed by Andrew 'Gattaca' Niccol, the film is set in a world where time has become currency and once you pass the age of 25 you have to keep working to buy more time – unless you're one of the controlling elite. Expect the Blu-ray to feature a 2.40:1 1080p presentation of the movie with DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio, plus a collection of deleted/extended scenes and a look behind-the-scenes.

www.fox.co.uk

A very pretty bird



Universal Pictures is celebrating *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s 50th anniversary in the UK with a deluxe Blu-ray release of the film on February 13.

The limited edition digibook packaging will include reproductions of Gregory Peck's script pages, plus personal letters and storyboard art, while the Blu-ray itself features a newly restored transfer plus a host of extras, including a commentary, interviews, archival promo clips, a look at the restoration process, and documentaries about the making of the film and its leading man.

www.universalpictures.com

To BD or not to be



Best known for crafting world-ending disaster movies like *The Day After Tomorrow*, director

Roland Emmerich tries his hands at something a little bit different with *Anonymous*. Set during the Elizabethan era, the film sets out to reveal the identity of the author behind William Shakespeare's plays. Sony Pictures is bringing the film to Blu-ray and DVD in the UK on 5 March, with the hi-def version arriving accompanied by a commentary from Emmerich and writer John Orloff, five deleted/extended scenes and a trio of featurettes.

www.sonypictures.co.uk

Return of the king

Game of Thrones: The Complete First Season
HBO Video • All-region BD/R2 DVD

Based on George RR Martin's best-selling *A Song of Fire and Ice* saga, this fantasy series became one of HBO's biggest hits when it aired last year. With the second season starting in April, HBO is giving fans the chance to reacquaint themselves with the show's web of characters and events when it brings the first season to Blu-ray and DVD in the UK on March 5. Expect plenty of extras, including a BD-exclusive 24-part animated history of the Seven Kingdoms and in-episode guides.



Tech Diary

Our calendar is here to make sure you don't miss out...

→ JANUARY

13: War Horse



Steven Spielberg directs this eagerly anticipated bigscreen version of Michael Morpurgo's much-loved novel. Find out how it measures up to the spectacular stage production when it opens at UK cinemas today. www.disney.co.uk

16: Killer Elite

Jason Statham. Clive Owen. Robert De Niro. Guns. Explosions. These are just five of the many reasons we're looking forward to catching up with this old-school action film when it hits BD and DVD in the UK today. www.entertainmentfilms.co.uk



20: The Sitter
Remember 1987's *A Night on the Town* (aka *Adventures in Babysitting*)? If so, then you'll have a good idea what to expect from this new Jonah Hill comedy that opens today at UK multiplexes. www.fox.co.uk

30: Star Trek: The Next Level
Beaming into UK stores today, this *Star Trek: The Next Generation* sampler brings the episodes *Encounter at Farpoint: Part 1 & 2*, *Sins of the Fathers* and *The Inner Light* to Blu-ray for the first time. www.paramountpictures.co.uk

31: ISE 2012
Amsterdam's RAI once again plays home to the annual Integrated Systems Europe, a three-day trade show dedicated to professional AV and system integration. www.iseurope.org

→ FEBRUARY

9: Star Wars: Episode I 3D



The first of the 3D conversions of the *Star Wars* saga hits UK cinemas today. And George Lucas has threatened that

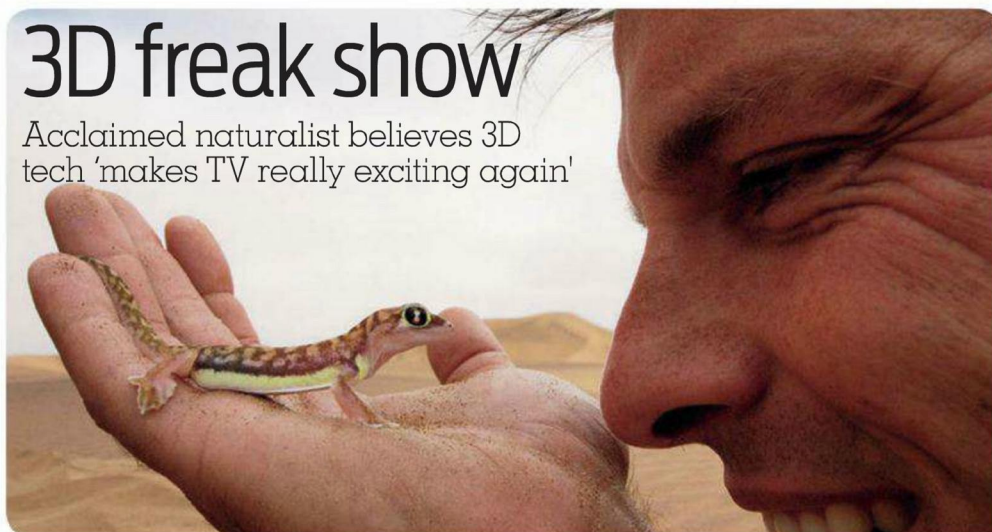
if we don't go and see this one, we won't get any more... www.fox.co.uk

9: HCC #205

Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands today, packed with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and in-depth software reviews

3D freak show

Acclaimed naturalist believes 3D tech 'makes TV really exciting again'



This month sees TV naturalist Nick Baker entering the third dimension with a groundbreaking one-off special entitled *Beautiful Freaks*. Airing simultaneously on Sky 3D and Discovery Channel on January 14, the programme was filmed across a 3,500-kilometre, 21-day journey in the frequently inhospitable southern African country of Namibia, and gives viewers an intimate encounter with some of nature's weirdest and most beautiful creatures.

The terrain, which varied from the Brandberg Massif Mountains to the Skeleton Coast, is itself characterised by a savage beauty that the 3D cameras capture so well. And naturally, filming in such an environment using – amongst other things, delicate custom-built camera rigs worth £150,000 – presented challenges of their own.

Technical challenges

When HCC caught up with the programme director, Tigress Productions' Charlotte Jones, she explained her aim – to make the programme in 3D but with a very fluid 2D shooting style. Doing this required two full-stereoscopic 3D rigs, a smaller Panasonic AG-3DA1 model and a 2D camera.

Dan Korn, Discovery Europe's Head of Programming, told HCC that the 3D work of *Beautiful Freaks* represents an 'ongoing commitment to technical and editorial innovation'. In the US, Discovery has launched a dedicated 3D channel 3net – we hope that its equivalent appears in the UK before long.

Prior to making *Beautiful Freaks*, Baker was cynical about 3D: 'I grew up in the '70s and '80s,' he told HCC, 'when it meant things leaping gratuitously out of the screen like *Jaws 3D* – I just didn't get it. But when asked to take part, I said "yes" anyway!'

Little did Baker know what he was letting himself in for: 'We had to throw away the programme-making rule books, and rid ourselves of all the techniques we had learnt. I only suggested going to Namibia because it had decent infrastructure and



Nick Baker: 'With 3D, it's so much easier to explain what makes these animals tick'

great animals – safari creatures, as well as weird and wonderful highly-adapted desert life. What

I hadn't realised is that this camera rig was so new, it had all its cogs and sprockets on the outside. We were going to take this complex machine out of the hands of the chap who had lovingly built it over the last two or three months, and take it to the dustiest and windiest environment on Earth!' Among these hazards was the arid Namib desert's 'black magnetic sand'.

Exotic environment

Baker was quick to realise the benefits of shooting in 3D, though: 'The first day, we were shooting bat-eared foxes. I was jet-lagged, I had an eye infection – which doesn't look good in 3D – and as the sun rose, it got hotter and hotter. Charlotte asked me to come into this little lodge, where the team had set up a 3D screen to preview the rushes... There's something about 3D that brings these animals to life. It's a gentle process, a totally natural way of viewing the world – like having a window on this environment in your living room'.

Indeed, Baker went as far as admitting to HCC that 3D 'makes TV really exciting again' and looks forward to doing more work in the format. And judging by the preview screening we attended, the programme has harnessed the new technology to its full. The sense of depth is palpable, and you can perceive the featured animal relative to its surroundings. Even the butterflies flitting around some of the more habitable regions can be accurately positioned within the frame. And when Baker handles one of the 'freaks', all of its unique characteristics and textures become apparent.

Short of heading out to Namibia yourself, *Beautiful Freaks* gives you the best opportunity imaginable to meet a parade of nature's most extraordinary and unusual creatures.

Animal magic: Baker and a feathered friend



a class above

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Q300 5.1 System, What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision, August 2011



Q Series

In celebration of KEF's 50th Anniversary you can enjoy an award-winning Q Series multi-channel AV system, **now with an exceptional 10% discount.**

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DX-1 HCP

5.1 SYSTEM



Stylish, compact and eminently affordable, the new DX-1 HCP

home cinema speaker system takes its design cues from the famous, multi-award winning Diamond 10.1 speakers. DX-1's sleek design packs a lot into a package which is beautifully discreet and easy to accommodate in the home.

DX-1 HCP consists of four satellite speakers standing just 19cm tall, plus an equally diminutive, but dynamic, centre speaker and a powerful, compact, active subwoofer, all built and finished to an exceptionally high standard and available in high-gloss white or black.

Delivering exhilarating detail and amazing sonic scale for such small speakers, the Wharfedale DX-1 HCP handles music and movie soundtracks with equal aplomb. Truly, this is one home cinema package that is small, yet perfectly formed.

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION



Wharfedale DX-1 HCP

What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, Awards 2011

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 Scott backs Blu

Award-winning filmmaker Sir Ridley Scott has stuck the boot into film streaming services, claiming that they don't allow audiences to see films as the director intended. In an article written for *The Huffington Post*, Scott states that 'technology will need to make many more huge leaps before one can ever view films with the level of picture quality and sound quality film lovers demand without having to slide a disc into a player... Blu-ray for the foreseeable future remains the finest technology to preserve the impact and enjoyment of watching movies at home'.

2 Supermarket sweep

Tesco has started using movie-streaming site to Blinkbox to offer a new service that gives its Clubcard customers a free digital copy of a film when they buy the DVD or BD. Eligible titles including *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* and *Transformers 3*.

3 Blu-ray buoyant

Blu-ray sales in Europe skyrocketed to 63 million units this year, a 42 per cent increase on 2010's 44 million units, according to a report from the boffins at Futuresource Consulting. The percentage increase is similar elsewhere, with global Blu-ray sales rising 45 per cent to 234 million units for 2011.

4 Spotify spreads

Onkyo has added Spotify functionality to three additional AV receivers/packages with its latest firmware update. Available from www.onkyo.co.uk for the TX-NR509, HTS6405 and TX-8050, it enables onboard access to Spotify and direct support for Spotify Premium via Onkyo's Remote App for Android.

5 3D movies 'not enough'

Sony Pictures' CEO Michael Lynton has conceded that 3D Blu-ray will not be enough to drive adoption of 3D at home. Speaking to investors, he

stated that mainstream adoption would have to be driven by 'sports, nature programming – like what Discovery is doing – and gaming' rather than films.

6 Mile-high tab

American Airlines is offering a cutting-edge spin on in-flight entertainment. The company has announced that customers travelling in its first and business class cabins on selected domestic flights will have access to specially-branded Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 tablets pre-loaded with 70 films, including 30 new releases.

7 USA fights back against loud adverts

The FCC (Federal Communications Commission) is attempting to solve the problem of over-loud TV adverts in the US with the introduction of the CALM (Commercial Advertisement Loudness Mitigation) Act. Due to come into effect next December, the Act requires that TV ads have the same average volume as the programmes around them. Here's hoping Ofcom does something similar in the UK.

8 Xbox upgrade

Microsoft has announced that BBC iPlayer will be coming to its Xbox 360 console via an Xbox Live app in 'early 2012'. The console recently underwent a major update that included the addition of numerous on-demand and streaming services including LOVEFILM, 4OD and Blinkbox.

9 3D made easy

Sky has launched its very own 3D Test Card to help customers get the best from its stereoscopic broadcasts. Hosted by Zoe Ball, the video offers tips about viewing angles, lighting, audio sync, contrast, brightness and more. Catch it daily at 12.45am on Sky 3D, or via Sky Anytime and at www.sky.com/3DTestCard.

10 Updated audio

Meridian has introduced firmware update for a variety of its surround sound controllers and speakers. The former benefit from the addition of proprietary 'apodising' style upsampling filters and enhanced Direct and Stereo DSP presets, while speakers get improved Sooloos system integration and crossover alignment.



Reference 861: Just one of Meridian's sound controllers to benefit from the update

Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Financial crisis

Lionsgate is starting work on a 'micro-budget' reworking of *American Psycho* that will update the story to reflect the current economic climate on Wall Street.

Muppet madness



The new Muppet movie has run into trouble at Fox News, with business news anchor Eric Bolling claiming the film promotes an anti-capitalist message by having a rich oil boss named Tex Richman as the villain. Wocka Wocka Wocka indeed...

Starship poopers

If the thought of a *RoboCop* remake wasn't bad enough, it's now been confirmed that a *Starship Troopers* remake is on the cards – presumably without the clever satire of the original.

X-Men pirate nicked

The New York man responsible for the online leak of *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, a month before the film opened at cinemas, has been sentenced to one year in a Federal prison. You're snikt!

Wanted...

Got an exciting home cinema setup? Want to see it featured in an upcoming issue of *Home Cinema Choice*?

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WELCOME TO...

The future of AV

As we settle into a new year, it's only natural to wonder what tech developments the next 12 months will bring. But why stop there?

Team HCC looks forward to 2017...

Trend-setter:
Toshiba's 4K
ZL2 TV points
the way to our
AV future



DISPLAY

What will we be watching movies on in 2017? Everything and anything. In tomorrow's connected universe, content will be available on multiple screens, often concurrently. We won't necessarily be watching in a linear fashion anymore; video will hop between screens and even follow us around the house.

In five years, twin-screening will be the norm. We're already seeing the habit take hold in living rooms around the UK, driven by a desire to comment on live shows through social media; millions now enjoy watching TV on the living-room screen while following Tweets about it on a smaller personal device. At present that second device can be a phone, laptop or tablet, but over the next few years tethered second screens will gain traction.

But not only will our viewing habits change over the next half-decade, we'll also be on the verge of another big quality jump as manufacturers make a concerted effort to move premium viewers (that's you) to super-hi-res 8million pixel 4K x 2K screens. Marc Nikolai, managing director of Loewe UK, believes that 4K is not only inevitable; it'll herald a move to mega-screen sizes.

'We think 4K will be a big driver for super-large TVs,' he says. 'As a category, 60in-plus screens have been declining of late, but the arrival of 4K will reverse that.' He confides that the first 4K displays from Loewe are scheduled to go on sale towards the end of 2013.

More intriguingly, the futurists at Loewe believe our growing dependence on cloud-based IPTV services will have a fundamental impact on the type of TVs we look to buy. With everything on tap from the cloud, the idea of built-in tuners will become redundant, suggests Nikolai. It seems Loewe is so convinced of this that it already has IPTV-only monitors on its product roadmap. 'We intend to launch these in 2013 as well.'

Of course, it's highly likely that by 2017 there will be multiple new display technologies vying >



Twin screen: Forward-thinking brand Loewe has already shown this double-display concept TV

Supersize 4K: Home cinema projection will be a key market for 4K video



Sony's HMZ-T1 'personal viewer' does away with the TV altogether



for attention. Perennial underachiever OLED should make some headway, as mass-production techniques are finally reconciled with the

demands of the technology. The catch is that the next few years are likely to see a decline in the amount of money CE companies invest in R&D as consumer demand shrivels and price-cutting makes the sector increasingly unattractive.

This could make it difficult for radical new ideas to come to market. One bold concept, Quantum Dot (QD) technology, which uses tiny crystals to produce an image on flexible plastic displays, could well suffer as a result.

UK-developed semiconductor nanoparticles could be used to usher in roll-up QD displays for wall-sized TVs. Michael Edelman, the chief executive of QD specialist Nanoco, has hinted that his company is already working with mainstream TV makers to commercialise the technology. Fingers crossed on that one.

Of course, in one parallel future universe, we may decide to abandon the traditional

television altogether, preferring to wear our tellies on our heads. That's if Sony's unique personal 3D viewer, the HMZ-T1, takes off. This helmet headset creates a totally immersive viewing experience, with a couple of small, hi-res OLED panels and multichannel sound system. And smaller, lightweight versions of this stereoscopic HUD are already in development...

CONTENT

You might think that when it comes to content, the future is easy to predict: physical discs are destined to follow the dodo as we migrate our sound and vision to the cloud. However, there's no indication just which cloud we might be migrating to, and no one we've talked to seems keen to abandon Blu-rays or DVDs just yet.

Gennaro Castaldo, spokesman for HMV, says he cannot imagine a disc-free world in just five years. 'That's far too pessimistic a scenario,' he says, adding that he envisages a viable long-term market for physical media, particularly that old favourite DVD. 'The DVD format is more robust than we sometimes give it credit for.'

One possible future could see UltraViolet become the evolution of Blu-ray and streaming. It's certainly a prediction favoured by many of the Hollywood majors. UV relies on consumers continuing to buy discs, which in turn unlock digital copies to be streamed to multiple devices.

But even some of its supporters seem to think UltraViolet is a long shot. 'UV is a far future technology,' says So Saida, senior director of business strategy and development for Sony Entertainment Network. Because the tech requires a broad base of compatible products, Saida argues it's not going to take-off anytime soon. He has his own agenda, of course, the cloud-based Sony Entertainment Network, but he's probably right. ➤

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Hot picks for 2012

Blockbuster flicks we'll be first in line for...

The Avengers

Iron Man, Captain America, Thor and Hulk join forces

Prometheus

Ridley Scott delivers the long-awaited prequel to *Alien*

The Dark Knight Rises

The epic conclusion to Chris Nolan's superhero saga

The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey

Peter Jackson returns to Middle-earth – and at 48Hz...

The Expendables 2

If you aren't excited by this action sequel, you must be dead

The Amazing Spider-Man

A 3D reboot for Peter Parker and his web-swinging antics

Skyfall

Daniel Craig's Bond returns to the bigscreen after a four-year break

Django Unchained

Quentin Tarantino turns his attention to the Western

Taken 2

Liam Neeson's retired CIA agent Bryan Mills is back. Woo-hoo!

Stream on: VOD services are likely to become the norm for everyday consumers, rather than an exception



A better digital locker bet in the UK may be Tesco. It's easy to imagine the super-retailer building a head of steam through its alliance with streaming service Blinkbox, and commanding a significant amount of cloud space in five years' time. Blinkbox is fast becoming a regular on connected Smart TVs and set-top boxes.

Says Tesco's Director for Entertainment, Rob Salter: 'Packaged media has got a long-term future in stores and online, provided we learn from history and bundle digital and physical rights together, rather than forcing their separation.'

'The historical precedent of a linear progression from one format to the next is coming to an end.'

Certainly, in five years, we anticipate that streaming movies will be the norm rather than the exception, but no one service is likely to have a monopoly. The kicker is that the bulk of these services will revolve around 'rental' rather than purchase. Consequently, there's good reason to think that there will still be a market for disc ownership in 2017, particularly when it comes to special editions in HD and 4K versions of movies on some souped-up BD variant.

And Robert Price, the big UK cheese at Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, is in no doubt that discs will endure. 'People will always want to own the movies and TV shows they love, and will demand something tangible.' Indeed, he confidently predicts: 'Physical discs will continue to account for the majority of our business well past the five-year mark.'

No change: Big, powerful AVRs will live on

AUDIO

The area of home cinema sound is the one where we expect the least amount of change in the coming years. Lossless 96kHz/24bit soundtracks in 5.1- or 7.1-channel surround sound are pretty much standard on Blu-ray discs, today's AV receivers offer high-speed audio processing and oodles of power, and loudspeaker tech hasn't changed radically since the 1920s. The next five years will see only incremental enhancements.

Dolby and DTS will, naturally, continue to tweak and enhance their lossless formats. Additional channels are already part of the codec specification of each and more AVRs are entering the market with nine-channel amplification. So will your home cinema system in 2017 contain enough speaker drivers to blow your sofa off the floor? Probably not. Most systems are set up as 5.1 with buyers not bothering with rear-back channels. Only the more enthused AV addicts have opted for the full 7.1 package and fewer still have integrated height or width channels. As such, there is little pressure on studios to master film mixes for home distribution in any more than 5.1- or 7.1-channel surround sound.

Of course, that isn't going to stop CE brands integrating the technology for those enthusiasts willing to go the extra speaker mile. The specification trumps race will see AVRs evolve with more amplified channels, more features, more power and one new(ish) technology that could make the latter easier than ever – digital amplification.

In five years, the size, weight and efficiency advantage of digital amplification should make all AVRs smaller, lighter and more powerful – but it probably won't. Famous devices to successfully implement digital amplification



thus far have been absolute beasts, notably Sony's STR-DA9000ES and Pioneer's Susano LX90. As Denon's Roger Batchelor points out: 'I think we will still have big, beefy AVRs long into the future. For the best possible performance you cannot beat a hefty power supply and power to spare.'

So what of loudspeakers in five years' time? Wireless technology will certainly have an impact, with subwoofers in particular benefiting from wireless signal transfer. As the amplifier is built into the cabinet and the device requires a power lead, integrating wireless connectivity is a simple way of eliminating long signal cables. Making main speakers wireless is a lot trickier as the power amplifiers have to be moved from the AVR and into each speaker cabinet. Not only does this increase overall cost due to multiple power supplies, it also requires a power-lead... making wireless speakers very much wired.

Of the more interesting speaker developments of late, shallow cross-section drivers have made almost-flat speakers a reality. Models like KEF's stunning T-Series (pictured below-left) are genuine performance contenders whereas previous 'true' flat-panel designs such as NXT did not cut the home cinema mustard. Expect this category to explode in the coming years.

In terms of out-there speaker tech, THX is still noodling away on its beam-steering line array, which uses a single speaker with up to 100 small drivers and complex DSP to create a tightly focused stereo image in multiple sweet spots. This could be where the future of home cinema audio ultimately lies, but it will require forward-thinking brands to buy into the technology.

CONTROL

The future of home entertainment control is voice and gesture. We know this because for decades movies have been predicting it. When Tom Cruise began swiping screens in *Minority Report*, it was immediately clear how we'd all be cruising our EPGs in the years to come.

In fact, that future has already arrived. The success of Microsoft's Kinect threatens to make gesture control of telly content old hat by 2017, and thanks to Apple's introduction of the SIRI intelligent software assistant on the iOS platform, we already have a pretty good idea what our TVs are going to sound like in a couple of years.

Few analysts doubt that Apple intends to use a language user interface on its upcoming living room TV products. And rivals in Japan and Korea will be fast-tracking similar tech just so that they can compete. Indeed, the introduction of voice control will let the TV market ape what's already happened with Satnav – you'll be able to pay for downloadable voice packs. Want your TV to sound like Homer Simpson? No problem!

Shawn DuBravac, Director of Research for the Consumer Electronics Association, believes that voice control is 'the most natural interface of all,' but ultimately it's simplicity that will win in the day: 'The first remote was big and tethered to a TV. Then it went from four buttons to 40. Now the drive is to make that complexity easy to use.'



Of course, the TV of tomorrow will not only speak, it'll also be able to see. During 2011, pretty much every Smart TV found itself with Skype functionality – all that was needed was a plug-in HD webcam. Fast forward and that camera will be integrated into the bezel. Combine this with face recognition and you'll have TVs that are genuinely able to recognize who's watching them. Throw in some Android or iOS-powered awareness sensors and by 2017 your new TV will turn itself on when you enter the room, issue a welcome in a celebrity voice, select your preferred default channel/picture settings, and give you a spoken update of what you've missed on your favourite soaps.

Then again, maybe in five years we'll start to see the introduction of altogether more radical ways to interact with our TVs. The visionaries at Panasonic believe there's no reason that a user interface needs to be 2D. It could be 3D, with items that roll forward or stretch back into the screen. Senior engineer Yue Fei, from the brand's San Jose R&D facility, sees parallax effects as a chance to add a graphical representation of time into the TV UI. 'We want to not only make the user experience more intuitive, but also allow people to look at the history of their commands, stretching backwards into the screen. It's a different type of interface.'

Perhaps the future of AV control isn't about speech or gesture at all? Maybe it's about time and space instead? Cue the BBC Radiophonic Workshop...



Moving on up: Motion control, as used by Microsoft Kinect, is set to become a home cinema staple

Growing the screen:

Apple will follow its revolutionary iPad with its own flatscreen TV – and bring voice control with it



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The movies that Blu-ray forgot...

Team HCC names and shames the blockbuster movies that you still can't buy on Blu-ray

Since Blu-ray software first appeared in 2006, thousands of titles have been released – some more than once. Yet there is still a huge catalogue of films that home cinema fans are unavailable to savour in hi-def. And these aren't all dodgy sequels and low-budget horrors – the list of the unloved includes classics from Steven Spielberg, Roman Polanski, Alfred Hitchcock and David Lean and blockbusters from the likes of Michael Bay, James Cameron and McG.

Now, studios will argue that remastering BDs takes time, costs money, and that sometimes it's

not even their fault. Rather, pesky directors who insist on approving releases are to blame.

We say: not good enough. In what universe does *Drop Zone* merit a Blu-ray release but *Bad Boys II* doesn't?

AV enthusiasts have supported the format since day one. So now, nearly six years on, it's time for the format to give something back. The following movies would be a good place to start... >





Bad Boys II (top) and *Badlands*: both classics in their own way, both unavailable on Blu

You might have to wait for the rumoured remake of *Barbarella* to get your mitts on the original



The Abyss

Considering James Cameron's vocal support of the Blu-ray format, the absence of this watery sci-fi/disaster flick is hard to swallow. Released in cinemas in 1989, and again as a Special Edition in 1993, there are plenty of assets around, including the hour-long *Making of...* doc and interviews that surfaced on the THX-certified LaserDisc edition. And seamless branching would make it a doddle to include both versions on one platter. However, with Cameron tied up making *Avatar 2* and *3*, we doubt he has the time to revisit the bottom of the sea just yet – and it'd be a brave studio (in this case, 20th Century Fox) that would release a BD version without his consent.

Bad Boys II

Picture the scene: Hollywood heavyweight Michael Bay is pouring over Blu-ray copies of his past movies, looking for action sequences he can lift wholesale for inclusion in his next *Transformers* sequel (as he did with *The Island* for *...Dark of the Moon*). Returning *Pearl Harbor* to its place on his shelf he moves his hand along, only to be greeted by an empty space. What's happened to *Bad Boys II*?

Well, incredible as it might seem, Bay's 2003 mega-budget action spectacular has never been released on Blu-ray, depriving us all of the chance to have its searing yellow 1080p visuals burnt into our retinas as Will Smith turns a parade of supercars into scrap metal. Shocking.



Badlands

Renowned director Terrence Malick has only made five feature-length movies in nearly three decades. Four of those (*Days of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line*, *A New World* and *Tree of Life*) have all been released on Blu-ray. This 1973 debut hasn't – and even its DVD release is a bit shoddy. *Badlands*' editor Billy Webber recently said he had recorded a commentary track for a new release, but there's no concrete news on when it might appear – and if it's put out by Criterion (as is the case with *Days of Heaven*) it'll be locked to Region A.

Barbarella

Roger Vadim's 1968 tongue-in-cheek sci-fi flick is a triumph of style over substance. But what incredible style it is. Boasting incredible production and costume design, the influence of which can still be felt to this day, it's hardly surprising that so many people would love to revisit *Barbarella* in high-definition, if only the option existed. The lack of a Blu-ray release can probably be put down to both Paramount's extremely slow exploitation of its back catalogue in hi-def, and the hope that the oft-discussed remake might finally get off the ground, giving the studio a huge wave of publicity it could tie the Blu-ray release into.

The Big Sleep

Even Humphrey Bogart's iconic detective Philip Marlowe would struggle to solve the mystery of why this film noir proves so elusive on Blu-ray – especially as its studio stable-mate *The Maltese Falcon* has already swooped onto BD in the US.

Adapted from Raymond Chandler's 1939 novel of the same name, Howard Hawks'



Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle was authored to BD by Sony Pictures in 2005 – but never released

1946 film doesn't always make complete sense (even Chandler admits he never quite worked out all of the deaths in his own story!), but it remains a classic of the crime genre. Presuming that a complete restoration is on the cards, we'd love to see a Blu-ray that includes the 1945 and 1946 edits of the film, all of the existing DVD extras and maybe even the 1978 remake as well!

Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle

There's a very good reason for including McG's 2003 blockbuster sequel on this list – and it's not that we're claiming it to be an unjustly overlooked cinematic classic long overdue a critical re-evaluation. Nor is it down to a desire to watch Cameron Diaz and chums running around in bikinis in 1080p (although that's

no bad thing in itself).

No, *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* deserves to be available on BD for no other reason than it was the very first feature-length film Sony Pictures ever authored and

encoded onto Blu-ray back in 2005, so it could be used by hardware manufacturers to test the software compatibility of their disc spinners. So where the hell is it?

Chinatown

The continued absence of this Oscar-winning noir from Blu-ray shelves is a mystery that even detective J.J. Gittes would have trouble solving [*we've already done that joke – Ed*]. The official word is that there is no official word. There was a flurry of activity online in 2009 as rumours spread of an imminent release, but it never materialised. Could director Roman Polanski's exile from the US be the cause of the hold up? Has Paramount Pictures lost the original negative? Only time will tell.

Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway wait for *Chinatown* to arrive in HD



E.T. (top) and *Finding Nemo* (bottom) are sure-fire Blu-ray best-sellers – so why are we still waiting?



E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial

The first of three Spielberg entries in our roundup, *E.T.* has its 30th Anniversary this year. That, as well as a few hints from Spielberg, has us pinning this sugar-coated alien adventure flick down for a 2012 release. But which version – the 1982 original, or the 2002 re-release which added some CG effects and, for some reason, replaced the guns carried by federal agents with walkie-talkies? Spielberg told *Ain't It Cool News* in June last year, 'I always tell people to go back to the '82 version,' but we still expect both edits to surface in HD.

Finding Nemo

Pixar's CG-animated tale of a neurotic clownfish searching for his missing son is not only one of the studio's best-loved and most commercially successful movies, it's also the only remaining Pixar film to have not yet made the jump to Blu-ray. A release has been teased several times over recent years (the latest being a video that surfaced last October, with the main characters swimming towards a glowing Disney Blu-ray logo, followed by a title card reading 'Finding Nemo: For the First Time Ever on Blu-ray'), but we're still no closer to an official release date. Best guess at the moment is towards the end of the year, following the film's 3D cinema re-release in September – unless there's something fishy going on...

Get Carter

There are few British crime movies better than this 1970s entry starring Michael Caine and a multistory car park. Of course, a Blu-ray release of director Mike Hodges' gritty-looking thriller would no doubt start a row about the merits of visible film grain, but that's a risk we'd be prepared to take just to see the stark, Tyneside locations in all their cinematic glory – we'd even sit through a hi-def version of the Stallone

remake (which isn't out yet either). Chuck in a lossless mono mix and the Caine/Hodges commentary from the DVD release and you've got a must-have disc.

The Great Escape

Who'd have thought it? Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson and friends are still trapped in a grotty, standard-def prisoner-of-war camp, dying to escape to the lush, green pastures of hi-def. Filmed on-location, in colour and at 2.35:1, it's surely against the Geneva convention that this epic adventure hasn't been given a lavish Blu-ray release. Although we wouldn't bet against it finally getting a release in 2013, just in time for its 50th anniversary. Probably around Father's Day. Altogether now: De-dah... Da-derr-de-dah-dah... Dah-dah de dah-de-dah de dah dah...

Gremlins 2: The New Batch

While Joe Dante's original critter-fest has been available on Blu-ray for some time now, this underrated sequel is overdue similar treatment. The existing DVD proves that there's plenty of material available to make a Blu-ray release something special and our big hope would be the possibility of seamless branching to include both the theatrical and video presentations of the film (only the latter version is included on the DVD, featuring a longer cut of the pre-movie cartoon and an alternate scene of the gremlins interrupting the film itself). Add to that a sparkling new HD transfer and you have a disc that would delight the film's growing fanbase.

High Noon

Once described by John Wayne as 'the most un-American thing I've ever seen in my whole life', Fred Zimmerman's 1952 western is regularly hailed today as one of the all-time greats of American cinema. *High Noon* has also become a favourite with several US presidents, including Dwight D Eisenhower and Bill Clinton, and is on record as being the most requested film for screenings at the White House. Indeed, Clinton is said to have screened the film a whopping 17 times during his presidency. As such, you'd think that any studio would be falling over itself to get the film restored and onto Blu-ray as soon as possible, so that future US presidents can enjoy the movie in the best quality available.

Indiana Jones Trilogy

The fourth bigscreen outing for Harrison Ford's whip-waving archaeologist, *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, hit Blu-ray back in 2008. 'What a brilliant time to release the first three instalments of the Lucas/Spielberg franchise,' thinks every single home cinema fan. 'Nah, that'd be silly,' thinks someone at distributor Paramount. What the hold up could be is anyone's guess, but it better not be because Lucas is tinkering with the SFX. In the meantime, we'll just have to make do with the 1080i HD broadcasts we recorded from the BBC.



Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom – still a DVD-only relic

Jaws

We loved the *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* Blu-ray, we went bananas over the *Jurassic Park* box set, and we were left shell-shocked by *Saving Private Ryan* in 1080p. So it's not as if Spielberg collectors have been short-changed by BD. But *Jaws* ought to have been one of the first titles to launch. The bearded genius' greatest movie should be a flag-bearer for what the format can do – taking a film we've all seen countless times and showing it in a whole new light. The good news is that it's rumoured to surface on Blu-ray later this year – possibly alongside *Jaws 3D*. Good – but did we really have to suffer through *Hook* first?

Lawrence of Arabia

For the majority of film fans David Lean's 1962 classic is the greatest cinematic epic ever produced, making its absence on Blu-ray all the more notable. After all, who wouldn't want to be swept away by a hi-def presentation

Jaws in HD would look awesome, wouldn't it?
We may find out this Summer





of the film's exotic Middle East landscapes and thrilling action?

Thankfully, Grover Crisp and his team at Sony Colorworks have been working on a new 8K restoration of *Lawrence of Arabia* that will make its Blu-ray debut later this year, in time to celebrate the film's 50th anniversary. Having been lucky enough to see some 4K stills from the restoration, we're positive that the disc will have been well worth the wait.

Mary Poppins

'Cor blimey Mary Poppins, would you Adam 'n' Eve it? One of Dis-er-nee's best-loved films still ain't available on Blu-ray'.

Indeed, while the studio continues to do great things on Blu-ray with its library of animated movies, Disney has been much slower off the mark with its live-action classics. As a result, this award-winning 1964 musical is yet to see the light of day in high-definition, despite the obvious benefits that the improved picture quality and, especially, DTS-HD MA audio would provide. After all, who wouldn't want to listen to all of those classic songs in a lossless format? Not to mention Dick Van Dyke's legendary cock-er-nee accent.

Rebel Without a Cause

Another award-winner still waiting to make its Blu-ray debut is this 1955 drama from director Nicholas Ray, containing what is widely regarded as James Dean's seminal performance. In fact, any of the young film star's trio of films would be greatly appreciated on Blu-ray, but *Rebel Without a Cause* is the best of the bunch and, helpfully, it already underwent an extensive restoration for its 50th anniversary DVD release in 2005. Hopefully Warner Bros. isn't intending to keep us waiting until 2015 and the film's 60th anniversary to bring us the eventual HD platter.



The original negative of *Singin' in the Rain* (top) has been destroyed; the original *Titanic* (bottom) is currently being destroyed by 2D-3D conversion...



And don't forget...

These movies need hi-def, too...

After Hours; Annie Hall; Before Sunrise/Before Sunset; Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure/Bogus Journey; Blow Up; Bringing Up Baby; Cabaret; Catch-22; The Color of Money; The Devils; Double Indemnity; Dragonslayer; Ed Wood; Eraserhead; Fantastic Voyage; Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!; Freaks; Fritz the Cat; From Here to Eternity; Glengarry Glen Ross; Harold and Maude; The Haunting (1963); High Plains Drifter; His Girl Friday; Howard the Duck; Hud; Hudson Hawk; In the Mouth of Madness; The Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956); The King of Comedy; Kluge; The Limey; Marathon Man; The Marx Brothers films; A Matter of Life & Death; Mean Streets; Midnight Run; Monty Python and the Holy Grail; Nosferatu; Notorious (1946); On the Waterfront; Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid; Point Blank (1967); Police Academy; The Producers (1968); Re-Animator; Rear Window; Rosemary's Baby; Scanners; Scarface (1932); Schindler's List; Shane; Shaft (1971); Southern Comfort; Spirited Away; A Streetcar Named Desire; The Sting; Sunset Boulevard; The Thing from Another World; Tin Cup; Universal classic monster films; The War of the Worlds (1953); Westworld; Who Framed Roger Rabbit; The Wicker Man (1973)

Singin' in the Rain

The likes of *The Sound of Music* and *South Pacific* have done an excellent job of demonstrating what the Blu-ray format brings to the world of movie musicals. So it's a surprise to discover that possibly the greatest Hollywood musical of all time (sorry, *Paint Your Wagon*) is still not available. While rumours indicate that Warner Bros is currently restoring the film again with an eye to releasing it in BD later this year, the process has possibly been slowed down by the fact that the original negative no longer exists, having been destroyed in a fire. But given the wonders the studio achieved with its earlier 2002 DVD restoration, we expect the new one will definitely be worth singing about.

Titanic

Only *Avatar* has made more at the global box office than this 1997 weepie starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet and, er, Billy Zane. In fact, when Blu-ray launched, *Titanic* was still number one. Logically, it should have been the first Blu-ray to hit shop shelves – instead, we got *Into the Blue*. Director James Cameron worked on a 3D conversion for a theatrical release this Spring, so a release this year is highly likely – although whether it'll be in 2D or 3D remains to be seen.

True Lies

Another action flick that has been outrageously overlooked by the hi-def honchos. Even on DVD, Arnie's big budget spy comedy looks and sounds spectacular, so we can only dribble at what it might deliver on Blu-ray. It'll be 20 years old in 2014, so there might be a tie-in release then, but making fans wait eight years for it, yet still managing to knock out *The Sixth Day* and the rest of Schwarzenegger's weak later output, is the kind of short-sighted behaviour that gives ammunition to the anti-Blu-ray brigade. And we hate *them*.

Vertigo

Alfred Hitchcock is an often-celebrated filmmakers, but so few of his films are currently available on Blu-ray. More are expected to arrive later this year, but until full details and titles are confirmed, we're going to continue hoping that *Vertigo* will be amongst them.

Any new restoration had better prove less controversial than the 1996 effort, which came under fire for the addition of newly created Foley effects and claims that the new colour-timing (necessitated by the extremely faded nature of the surviving negatives) did not honour the filmmakers' intentions ●



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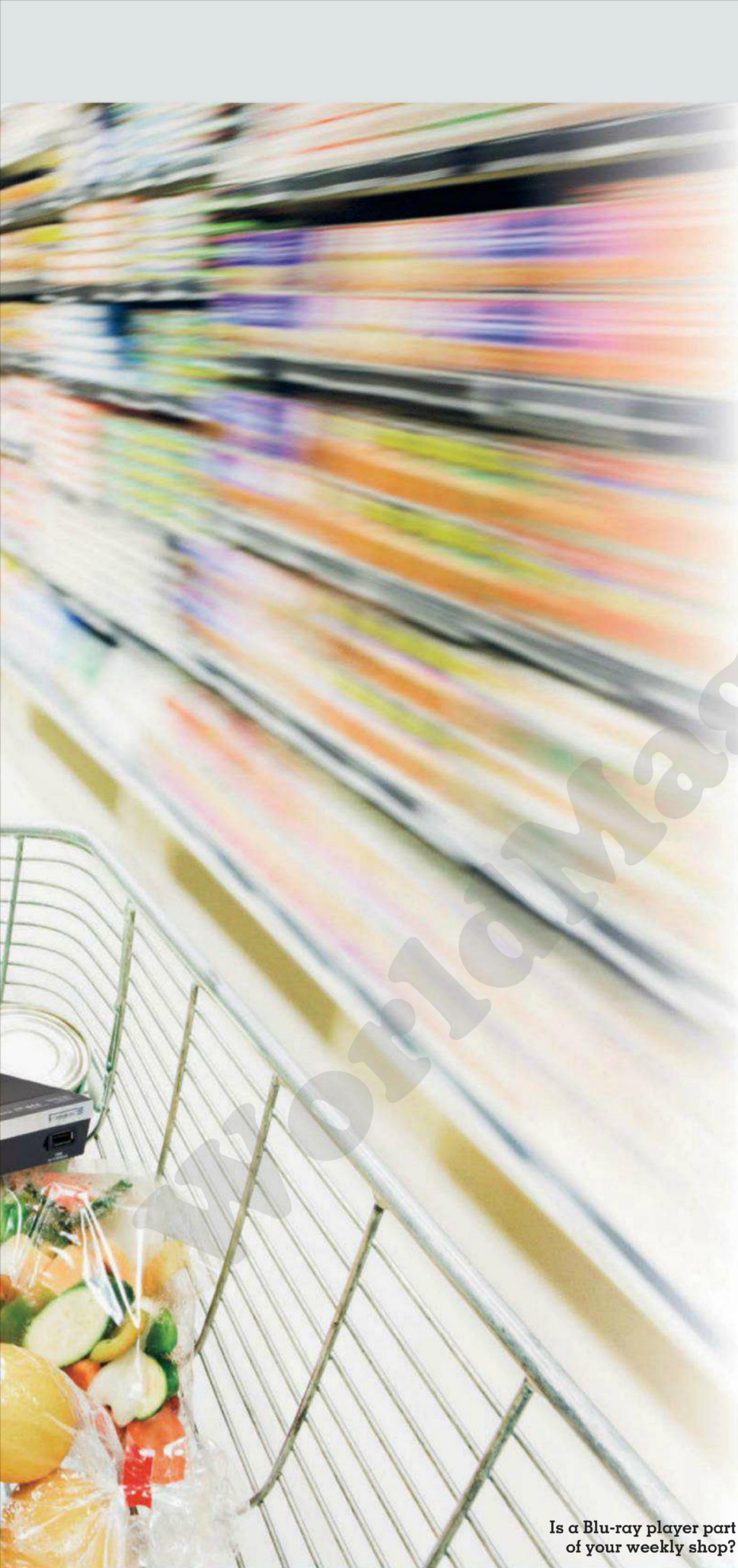
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Should you buy a £40 Blu-ray player?

Asda's budget BD-spinner costs the same as two Blu-ray discs. **Martin Pipe** discovers what makes it tick





A strange quirk of high-technology, apparently shared with no other aspect of human progress, is its evolutionary tendency to offer more at prices that spiral ever downwards. Halfway through the last century, we had it on good authority that the world would never need more than five computers (costing millions of dollars each). Nowadays, of course, computers are ubiquitous – you'll find them in just about everything. Indeed, it's nigh-on impossible to go through the day without encountering a computer in one form or another.

You'll certainly find a computer beating at the heart of this keenly-priced electronic wonder, brought you by another colossus of the modern age – the Asda supermarket chain. Its ONN-branded DS-BD52 Blu-ray player was, at the time of writing, selling for a mere £40. This was part of a pre-Christmas promotion, granted, but that only meant it was down from its typical £50 price. Put another way, this is a Blu-ray player that costs the same as a few BD discs. And if you're looking to add some HD playback to the various TVs littered around your house, you might be considering it.

That's why we went to Asda and bought one, so we could see what it's made of...

Technology moves forward

It may be cheap, but the DS-BD52 does more than the very first UK Blu-ray player – Samsung's BD-P1000 – which sold for twenty-five times the amount when it was introduced five years ago. Unlike the Samsung, Asda's deck supports BD-Live (provided a USB stick of at least 1GB in is inserted into its front port), will play a variety of different media, and has a 1080p24 HDMI output mode.

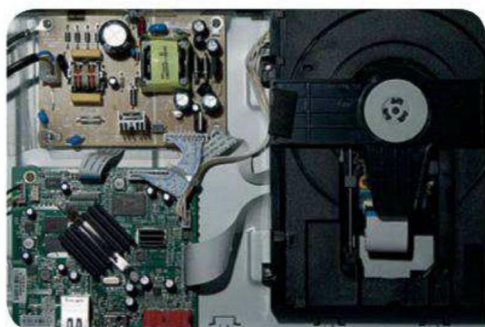
A compact and lightweight slab of a player, the DS-BD52 gives you everything you'll need for (non-3D) Blu-ray and DVD playback. For discs sold in this country, that is; I couldn't locate a multiregion handset hack and Asda told me that it was 'unable to recommend such information'. Talking of the handset, this has a reasonable feel. It's not backlit, though, and is essential for the most basic of operations. While the player's front panel has three buttons – standby, eject and pause/play – the latter doesn't start playback after a disc is inserted. The handset's menu controls are needed. So don't lose it!

Among the rear-panel sockets are HDMI and Ethernet, which is vital for downloaded BD-Live data. Nearly every 'big-brand' player – even the entry-level models – uses Ethernet to access multimedia content stored on a network or sites like YouTube and Flickr. The DS-BD52 can do none of this. You can, however, play a very limited range of content via USB. On the list are MP4, MKV and MPEG 1/2 video, plus WMA audio and JPEG still images. DivX/XviD video and MP3 audio, though, are refused entry.

This basic media player is found in a pleasant and fairly responsive menu system. Other submenus cover parental control, network configuration (default auto-configuration proved reliable, though) and AV setup. You'll need the latter to, amongst other things, engage the 1080p24 mode or switch the digital output

Is a Blu-ray player part of your weekly shop?

32 BUDGET BLU-RAY



Spot the difference: The inside of Cambridge Audio's 751BD high-end deck (top) packs more circuitry than Asda's budget offering (bottom)

from the default PCM two-channel setting to the multichannel bitstream needed for hi-res surround sound.

DVDs loaded in an acceptable 13 seconds, but Blu-rays caused the deck to have a bit of rest. I waited 1m 43s with one title. BD-Live content was also ponderously slow to appear, but this could have been down to network congestion.

The DS-BD52 turned in a respectable AV performance, with one or two caveats. Pictures were well-balanced as far as contrast and colour are concerned, and there was plenty of detail on offer if the source allowed it. All rewritable and recordable disc formats, with the exception of VR-mode DVD-RW and DVD-RAM, played fine. Meanwhile, upscaled DVD playback impressed.

My main criticism concerns the sound. Although Blu-ray DTS-HD MA and Dolby TrueHD soundtracks sounded flawless through my Onkyo TX-NR905 AV receiver, Dolby Digital 5.1 bitstreams sourced from DVD did – on occasion – suffer from drop-outs. Given the differences in bitrate, I would have expected the opposite to be true.

The price is right

Overall, Asda's DS-BD52 is a genuine option if you're on a very tight budget. It may not have all the frills associated with some of the better-known products, but even at the full price of £50 it's a bit of an eye-opener.

We saw similar price erosion when DVD reached maturity. In early 2007, I came across a supermarket DVD player with an incredible £10 price tag. The industrial powerhouse of southern China produced that player, and one of the countless anonymous OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) in that country is making the DS-BD52 for Asda. Much of the world's consumer

electronics – even products from brands we consider to be Japanese or English – is shipped from there nowadays. It's how they can remain competitive in a cut-throat price-driven market.

Yet nothing essential seems to have been sacrificed in functionality terms here. A look inside the DS-BD52 reveals neat construction and a minimal component count. There are four main elements – the switch-mode power supply, the main (AV) board, the front-panel USB/display board and the loader (optical drive). Compared to Samsung's BD-P1000, the box is empty. Much of the circuitry that lurked inside that chunky first-gen deck is now integrated into a handful of chips on the AV board, the most important being a BCM7631 made by manufacturer Broadcom. This includes a powerful embedded computer and dedicated DSP.

Among the jobs of this heatsinked wonder are the menu-driven player control and the decoding of high- and standard-def audio and video streams. It also handles the AV outputs and services the Ethernet port needed for BD-Live activity. The intent of 'jungle chips' like these is to reduce the bill of materials needed to build a Blu-ray player, thereby making it as cheap as possible. Yet Broadcom is pulling out of this market, and so Blu-ray players based around its chips will gradually disappear.

Another chip on the main circuit board is responsible for controlling the motors that spin the disc, and position the laser over the relevant track. There's also some RAM and non-volatile flash memory associated with the BCM7631, plus a handful of amplifier chips.

Reducing component counts has other advantages. The player can be made smaller and lighter, and more economical to ship. Then there's the lower power consumption – the DS-BD52 accounts for eleven watts. In contrast, the Samsung BD-P1000 consumed a meaty 45W.

So, lower manufacturing and shipping costs have undoubtedly driven down the price of the DS-BD52. There's another issue, though – licensing. The cost of acquiring the rights to use the intellectual property of companies like DTS and Dolby adds money to each player. However, labelling on the rear panel – and logos on the front – suggest that the relevant licences have been obtained. On the other hand, the DS-BD52's inability to play MP3 and DivX files (which can be handled by cheap DVD players) suggests the manufacturer has left out these features to avoid paying Fraunhofer (the inventor of MP3) and DivX Inc. their dues.

Even when all these factors are considered, I wonder how Asda can make a profit out of selling a perfectly-serviceable Blu-ray player for £40. You can expect to pay around £90 for a budget product from a known brand. And remember that everyone else involved in bringing the player to us – from the producers of its raw materials to the logistics operator that ships it from warehouse to store – needs to make a profit, too. We asked an Asda representative whether the DS-BD52 was a 'loss-leader' – an item sold at below cost price to entice shoppers. But they never gave us an answer... •

→ Analysis



GUI: Not the prettiest thing to look at – but can you moan at this price?

Power consumption: The DS-BD52 uses 11W when playing a disc – about as low as players from Panasonic *et al*

Killer feature: Considering this deck's affordability, the provision of basic media playback from USB is a welcome surprise

→ Specifications

3D: NO

Upscaling: YES to 1080p

Multiregion: NO Region B BD and Region 2 DVD

Connections: 1 x HDMI v1.3; 1 x coaxial digital audio; 1 x USB; 1 x Ethernet; 1 x composite; phono stereo audio

SACD/DVD-A: NO/NO

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD decoding: YES/YES

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD bitstream: YES/YES

Profile 2.0: YES but USB storage device needed

Dimensions: 360(w) x 33(h) x 210(d)mm

Weight: 1.3kg

Features: Ethernet (but no Wi-Fi); basic multimedia playback with HD photo support and slideshow; DVD-R/+R/-RW (video mode) support; CD-R/RW support; auto-standby (without playback resume); 1080p/24 support; choice of PAL or NTSC for composite-video output; repeat/random CD playback; 7 search speeds from 2x to 128x; MKV/X.264, MP4, WMA, MPEG-1, MPEG-2, JPEG, PNG, GIF, and BMP compatibility



HCC VERDICT

ONN DS-BD52 → £40 Approx
→ Supplier: www.asda.co.uk
→ Tel: 0800 952 0101

Highs: Compact design; insanely affordable; plays Blu-rays...

Lows: Occasional DVD audio dropouts; no networked or MP3/DivX multimedia playback; 4:3 aspect-ratio discs shown 'fullscreen' on 16:9 TVs

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Attic addict



A confined space need be no obstruction to home cinema nirvana, as **Martin Pipe** discovers

This issue's pro install reflects a common concern – how to harness wasted loft space. The brief here was to indulge the owner's passion for enjoying sports events in the company of friends and family, and to have movies and kids' TV shows accessible from a simple touch-screen controller. Support for 3D was a must, too.

When installer Finite Solutions conducted an initial survey of the property, it became clear that accommodating a full-blown seven-seat home cinema – and rear bar area – within the available attic space would be a bit of a challenge. To ensure that everything could be incorporated without compromise, the company produced a detailed

three-dimensional model of the room. This enabled Finite to give the owner a 'walk-through' of the proposed design before getting the drills out.

Widescreen wish

In addition to the AV equipment itself, Finite's work included lighting, carpeting, decorations and raised



Where are we, exactly?
That sloping ceiling is a clue...



A bar, complete with popcorn-maker, sits snugly at the back of the room

→ Kit Checklist

Projection: JVC X-7B
Screen: Screen Research 100in with anamorphic mask system
Amplification: Rotel RSP-1570 processor; RMB-1565 and RMB-1575 power amplifiers
Blu-ray: Denon DBP-1611UD
Other sources: Kaleidescape Home Cinema 450; Sky+ HD; PS3; Xbox 360
Front and centre speakers: B&W CWM7
Rear and side-surround speakers: B&W CCM682
Subwoofer: B&W ASW-10XP
Speaker cable: Chord Rumour
Infrastructure: Crestron TPS-6X 5.7in wireless touch-screen controller; Prodigy control processor; Prodigy lighting control; Middle Atlantic rack/cooling system
Cinema seating: Fortress – front-row fitted with D-Box motion-control actuators



Baby beamer:

The room's Kaleidescape system benefits from a dedicated 'child remote'

tiers for the cinema seats and bar. During the design phase, the owner decided to upgrade to a 21:9 display; fortunately, the chosen JVC projector was easily adapted to the desired aspect-ratio with a motorised Panamorph anamorphic lens. The acoustically-transparent 100in screen was then fitted with a masking system. During setup, the best display format for each source was determined and the system programmed so that the correct combination of masking and lens is applied automatically.

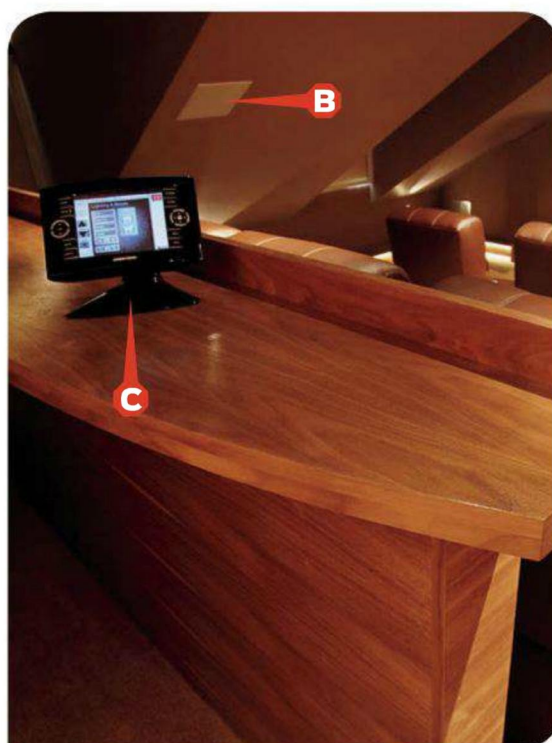
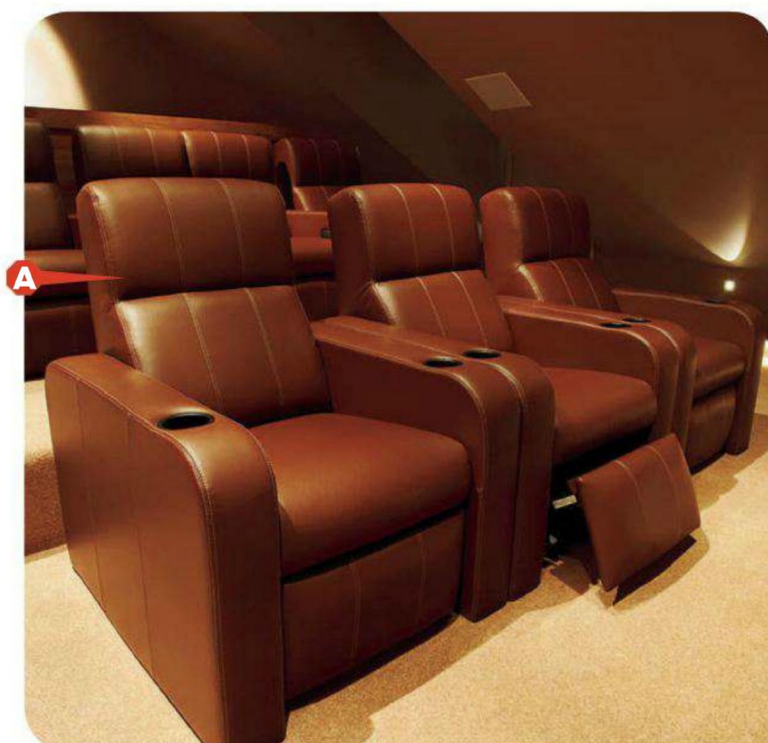
In-wall speakers from Bowers & Wilkins were specified for the 7.1

audio system. The CWM7 fronts and centre are positioned behind the screen, four CWM682s handling side and rear duties. All are driven by a Rotel processor and amplification. Low-frequency slam is provided by a sub, again from B&W, which is also concealed behind the screen. The Rotel processor, upgraded for 3D passthrough, handles display control, too. One of its audio outputs feeds a speaker mounted in the ensuite bathroom, ensuring that the owner misses none of the action.

To fulfil the ease-of-use brief, a Kaleidescape 450 stores the family's

movie collection. It's augmented by a Sky+ HD box and Denon DBP-1611UD 3D-capable Blu-ray player. These, together with the amplification and other equipment, are mounted in a hidden rack. A Crestron 5.7in touchpanel accesses pre-programmed lighting modes, and offers family-friendly 'movie-time' and 'intermission' presets.

The last neat touch is that the front row of cinema seats – which were covered with the owner's choice of leather – are enhanced by a D-Box motion-controller system. This allows them to feel, as well as hear, those explosions!



Room essentials

A All in leather

These comfy-looking seats were custom-made by Fortress. The front row have been enhanced with a D-Box motion-control system

B Discreet delivery

Bowers and Wilkins in-wall speakers were chosen for there unobtrusiveness as well as sound quality

C At your fingertips

This 5.7in Crestron touchscreen provides simple but comprehensive control of the whole cinema

D DVDs on demand

All of the owners DVDs have been imported into this Kaleidescape system for ease of access – while a Denon DBP-1611UD provides 3D Blu-ray playback

E Totally TV

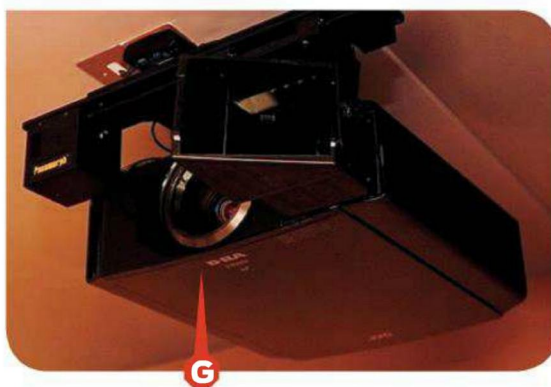
SkyHD presents the owners with all the hi-def sport the owners could possibly want

F Power it up

Rotel's RSP-1570 processor handles the decoding of Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio surround mixes

G CinemaScope capers

In front of the JVC 3D-capable X-7B projector sits a motorised anamorphic-lens for 21:9 movie presentation



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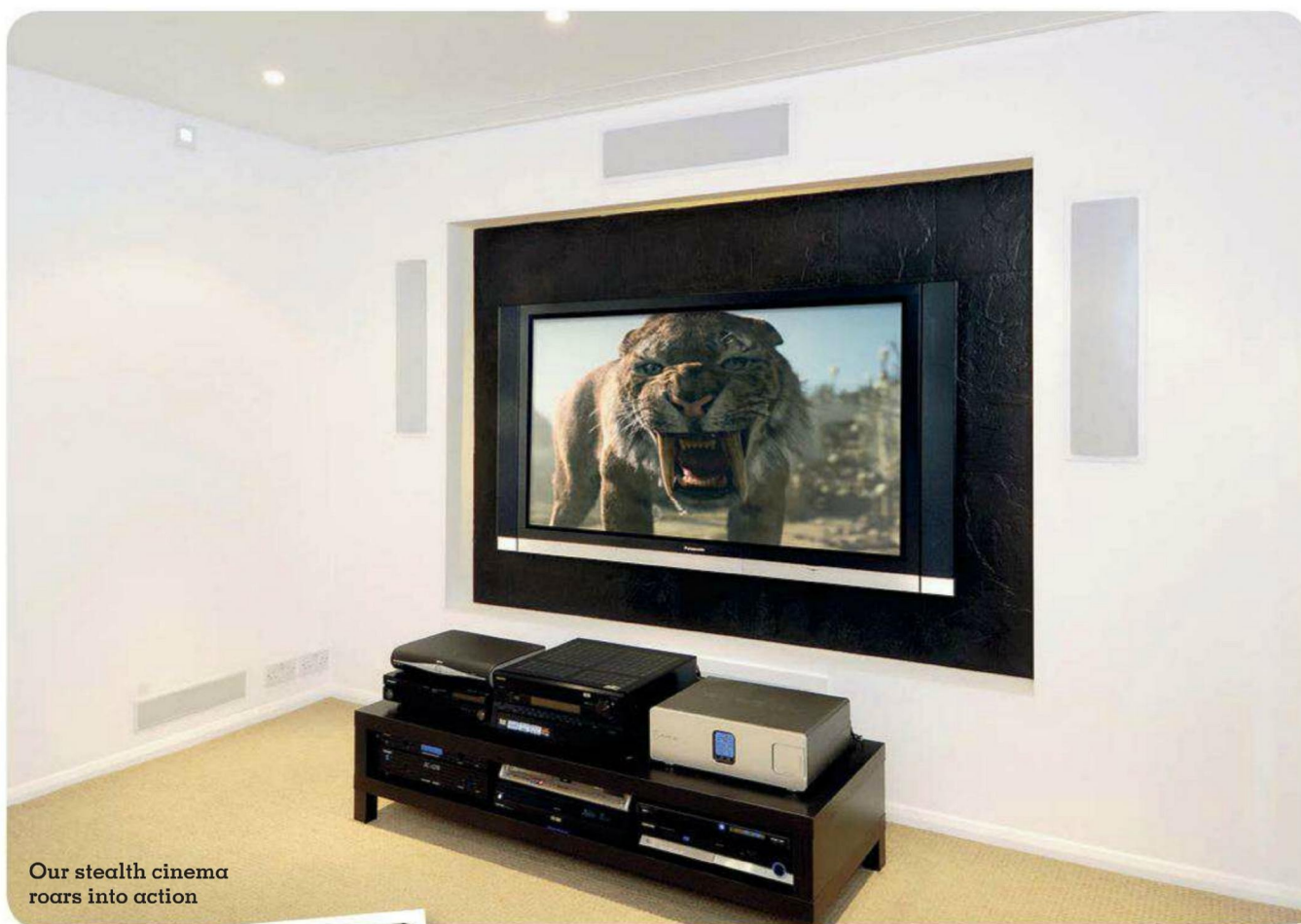
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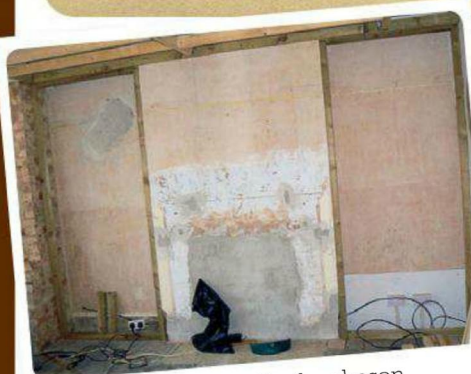
Grand finale

Part 4

In the last part of our D.I.Y. install build, **Chris Jenkins** assesses the AV experience achieved



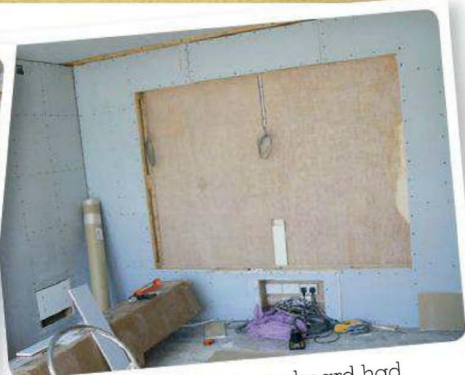
Our stealth cinema roars into action



Fire hazard: Originally, the chosen room had a fireplace where we wanted our displays to go. Grrr.



Cover up: With the fireplace covered and walls built either side to bring the surface level, the TV recess was marked out



Almost done: Once plasterboard had been attached to the stud frame, the screen area began to take shape

So, our kind-of-D.I.Y. home cinema project is finished. We've taken the sensible route of doing what we could ourselves, and calling on the professionals (builders, electricians and so on) when we came across something we couldn't (or shouldn't) sensibly handle. Of course, if you have the money, you can turn the whole job over to a professional installer – but where's the fun in that? What we've learned about specifying, fitting and tweaking a home cinema is just as valuable.

Admittedly, it was a pretty stressful process which took almost ten months, partly because of budget problems. Co-ordinating everything around fixed dates, such as the delivery of the sofa, was no picnic.

At this stage, we have to make a confession. Normally, an installation of this sort would have the source equipment hidden away in a rack system, or even in another room; but as this install was owned by an HCC contributor, it would be out in the open, ready to hand for constant twiddling and regular replacement.

So, did we achieve what we set out to do? The plan was to create a system with a hidden 7.2 speaker configuration (partly forced on us by the size of the room), which could function both for TV viewing with a 65in plasma and as a cinema with a 110in screen.

Certainly there are still some areas to address. One obvious flaw is that the hard wall surfaces need some acoustic treatment to prevent slap-back echo. The plan is to fit acoustic panels to alleviate this. Currently the rather trebly sound is not unpleasant, working well with action movies and delivering unmuddied dialogue, while the sofa end of the room is efficiently deadened by the heavy blackout curtains.

We probably overspecified the cabling needed, running two HDMI cables, component, composite, S-video, VGA and a couple of CAT5 network cables. Not all of this will be used, and we could probably have limited ourselves to the HDMI and 12V trigger cables, which would have saved time and money.

In use, the Definitive Technology Reference speakers prove their worth. Their rich, precise sound works equally well for highly dynamic movie soundtracks and multichannel music. Low frequencies in the room are surprisingly effective, with the in-wall Velodyne SC-1W subwoofers powered by a Velodyne SC-1250 stereo power amp. We used the Velodyne SMS-1 unit to tune the subs to the room. Using full DSP control, this is an unbeatable way to tailor bass response to the surroundings.

The original Onkyo TX-SR875 receiver and Panasonic TH-65PX600 65in TV are now due for replacement, and the disc player is now a Panasonic DMR-PWT500 combi 3D Blu-ray, while the projector is being upgraded to an Epson TW5800.

It's the little things that add a lot to the system, though; the Goelst



G-Rail system, which opens and closes the blackout curtains, the clever Niko lighting system and the stunningly quiet Daikin air conditioning add the finishing touches to the room.

Any problems? Well, predictably, our D.I.Y. solution to mounting the Screen Research screen gave us problems. After a few months the casing, screwed to the ceiling joists, started to rattle when the in-wall speakers hit high volume; the problem seemed to be caused by a gap opening up between two parts of the casing. In the short term we solved it with an injection of Mastic sealant, but time will tell if this is a permanent solution.

So if you're planning your own D.I.Y. home cinema project, hopefully our experiences will have given you some ideas. There's only one thing more fun than a fully-functioning home cinema room, and that's knowing that you've created it with your own blood, sweat and tears! ●

It's movie time: For serious film viewing, the projector screen descends from its hidden ceiling-frame to cover the 65in plasma



Sound treatment: While much of the room is in need of acoustic treatment, these curtains help deaden the rear



Substitute: The ceiling-mounted Mitsubishi projector is being replaced by a 3D model from Epson



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DIGITAL COPY

When BD Profile 2.0 first broke cover, we were all excited. **Mark Craven** wonders why – and whether glasses-free 3D will go the same way

In this issue we are casting our minds forward to imagine a home cinema of the future, but I've recently been reminiscing about the halcyon days of, oooh, 2008 – and specifically, the introduction of Blu-ray's Profile 2.0 specification.

Why? Because earlier this month I once again found myself confronted with BD-Live, the poster-boy of Profile 2.0, in full swing. And, what a pointless, trivial, waste of time it is.

I didn't do this on purpose, I should add. The introduction of a new BD deck with built-in Wi-Fi meant that the mere act of loading up a platter for some Friday night fun (*The Expendables*, if you must know) resulted in a flurry of activity not usually seen on the menu screen, most noticeably a constant ticker of movie news that any half-decent home cinema fan will have already known. Oh, and a widget telling me the weather in London. **I don't need a widget telling me the weather in London – I have a window I can look out of.**

This, of course, is what we were getting excited about in 2008, when BD-Live enabled Blu-ray players were doing the rounds at the Consumer Electronics Show. Looking back, that excitement now seems a little stupid.

In fact, the whole issue of Blu-ray specifications now seems a bit idiotic. Profile 1.1 added BonusView picture-in-picture functionality, which has its uses, I suppose (although unlike my colleague The Beek, I never seem to have the time to watch picture-in-picture *Making of...* docs). But, frankly, they might as well not have bothered with Profile 2.0.

At the time, this put HCC in a difficult situation. Had we known that the advances brought about by Profile 2.0 were to be so mindnumbingly irrelevant, we might not have been so harsh on players that didn't hit that spec. We called

a deck from Loewe an 'antiques roadshow' because it was about to be superseded. Superseded, that is, by nothing particularly worthwhile. So, er, sorry Loewe.

What goes around comes around

More importantly, the changing BD specs put AV consumers in a difficult situation. Who would spend money on a new player, knowing a different iteration was around the corner? And was it worth it for the manufacturers, if people were delaying possible purchases?

Five years on and we're in a similar situation with 3D. At present we have two different technologies to choose from – passive and active shutter – that are both capable of delivering exciting, absorbing 3D imagery. Yes, that's right: stereoscopic video, for those who haven't checked it out, is a lot of fun. In fact, it's so cool, we should all be rushing out and upgrading to 3D right now.

However, judging from the emails and letters we receive, that is exactly what isn't happening. And for some, it's because another form of 3D is on the way.

Glasses-free tech may be in its early stages, but it's clear that the industry sees this as the Holy Grail as far as 3D is concerned. The pro-autostereoscopy brigade reads like a who's who of cutting-edge tech – James Cameron, Sky, Sony – and they're committed to it is palpable.

So, as we move from 3D Profile 1.0 to Profile 2.0, where does this leave you, the cash-strapped AV addicts? Are those of you who have spent all year casting lustful glances at screens like Samsung's PS64D8000 now putting your wallets back in your pockets, waiting to see the newer wave of 3DTVs? If you are, the CE industry only has itself to blame.

Is your home cinema upgrade on hold until new technology arrives? Let us know via letters@homecinemachoice.com

While others take pride in being early adopters **Mark Craven** likes to leave things late – he's only just got his first HD DVD player





FILM FANATIC

The Beek really wants to celebrate the work of the late Ken Russell, but is having a devil of a time tracking down the filmmaker's movies in the UK

British cinema lost one of its true legends in November with the death of director Ken Russell. Regularly described as an iconoclast and the *enfant terrible* of the UK film industry, the Southampton-born Russell carved out a niche as one of our most pioneering and controversial filmmakers, yet one who has been mostly overlooked by the majority of DVD labels in his native country. Indeed, the only bright spot surrounding his passing is that UK studios and distributors might finally get their act together.

Because, as odd as it might seem, only a small selection of Russell's films are out on DVD in the UK. And few still have been treated with anything like the kind of care and attention they deserve. Of what are widely seen as his four best-known works, only *Women in Love* and *Altered States* are currently available – and as barebones discs in need of a serious AV overhaul. Meanwhile, *Tommy: The Movie* is out of print on DVD, and, while *The Devils* is finally on the cards for a Special Edition DVD release from BFI Video in March, it's of the 1971 UK cinema cut, not the 2004 restoration.

Other Russell movies are available on DVD over here, such as *Crimes of Passion*, but, again, little effort has been put into any of the discs. And there are others, like *Tommy...*, that have simply gone out of print – such as BFI Video's wonderful DVD releases of his celebrated biopics *Elgar* and *Delius: Song of Summer*. Put simply, there's nowhere near the range you would expect on these shores for such a uniquely British filmmaker.

Sex, death and religion

My own introduction to Russell's work came through his bigscreen take on The Who's 'rock opera' *Tommy*. At some point during a family visit to relatives in Bournemouth, I sat down with an

older cousin who was in the process of watching the film on video. Being of a somewhat tender age at the time, I pretty much missed the point of the film, but was at least enjoying the music – until Tina Turner's Acid Queen turned up with her sarcophagus full of hyperdermic needles. Maybe it was just Turner's singing, or maybe it was the sequence's confusing collision of wild sexuality and abject horror, but whatever the case, it was too much for my younger self and I fled the room.

After that traumatic incident, my first deliberate encounter with Russell's films came towards the end of the 1980s, when I watched *Altered States* and then *Crimes of Passion* in fairly quick succession after learning about them both from some now forgotten book about cinema. My teenage mind was much more willing to accept, understand and actively enjoy Russell's flamboyant aesthetics and controversial take on sex, death and religion (frequently all three at the same time). Before long I was watching everything of his I could find, from *The Devils* to *Gothic*, *Women in Love* to *The Lair of the White Worm* (my introduction to the wondrous Amanda Donohoe). **I collected and voraciously devoured every Ken Russell film I could find.**

But today, there are hardly any of his films in my collection. I had always hoped that somebody here in the UK would get the man himself involved in some reissues of his films on DVD, but clearly it was never to be. So now I just hope that his recent death might at least provoke a little more interest and demand in his oeuvre from the public. One that the studios and distributors might be willing to accommodate with a more complete collection of his work on DVD, and maybe even Blu-ray ●

Which other filmmakers are in need of more TLC on DVD?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

To this very day, Anton van Beek still flees in terror at the merest thought of Tina Turner's singing. Which is probably a very sensible thing to do



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Should I upgrade?

Hi. I have a dilemma about upgrading my cinema system. It currently comprises of a Sharp PLV-Z700 projector, Draper Luma 7ft screen, Sony STR-DH800 AVR, Mission M72 x 2 (fronts), Mission M7C1 centre, Mission M7DS rears, Yamaha sub, QED Bronze special edition speaker cable, a Sony BDP-360 Blu-ray player and an Xbox, PS3 and Wii.

I think the speakers do a good job, but I wonder how

much better my movies would sound with a new set of more up-to-date speakers. Simply put, if I go and spend up to £800 on a new set of speakers, will I really hear the difference compared to my existing Missions, and say that it was worth the upgrade?

I am considering the Q Acoustics 2050 5.1, and a Mission MX3 5.1 Package – I think I would like floorstanders.

So, do you think investing in new speakers is the right area

to spend the money for the best results for me, and which 5.1 speaker package would you recommend up to £800?

Anthony, via e-mail

You have got a very competent system there and even your current speakers don't really let the side down. The Q Acoustics package you suggest will certainly add a greater degree of guts and gusto to the sound but arguably they are a little less

tactile and detailed than your current Missions.

Now, a system built around good floorstanding speakers for the front main channels will stretch your budget somewhat, particularly if you are also looking to upgrade the subwoofer. It may be worth putting off the upgrade and saving up a few more pounds, which would open up a



KEF's C Series – a £1,000 upgrade

cornucopia of options. At around £1,000 you could find a deal on the stylish and flexible KEF C Series package and for another £100 or so you could be looking at a real big-box system in the shape of Acoustic Energy's NeoV2 5.1 system. For a few dollars more, the rich and articulate Dali Zensor 5 system is a great compromise between drive and boxiness, delivering a tight and punchy sound with scale that is in a different league to your current Mission system.

While these are more than your budget, the upgrade will be a real leap ahead in performance. And don't forget that well-looked after loudspeakers hold their value well on eBay, so the residual value of your system could take the sting out of the extra cost.

Doubling up my subwoofers

I have a 5.1 system (using the Monitor Audio Silver series speakers), but my AVR is capable of feeding two subs. What would I get 'extra' by adding another identical sub – in this case the RX-W12. My room is about four metres wide and five metres long. The sub is currently positioned in the rear-left corner. My understanding is that the low-frequency audio from a sub is non-directional – you don't hear where it is coming from, so why would I want another one elsewhere in the room? Is it just for volume?

Chris Hennessey via e-mail

Hi Chris, there are quite a few benefits of running two subwoofers in a home cinema system – and not just for achieving a bigger bang. With your sub positioned in a corner you are benefitting from up to 9dB of room-induced gain. While this is a great way of getting more bass, the sound can often be a bit sluggish and bloated. Moving the sub to mid-wall placement offers less artificial gain, so you may need to push up the sub level a few dB, but the sound will have more slam and impact.



LFE: Two subs will give you smoother and tighter bass – but don't mix 'n' match...

If you are keen to play movies at high volume then your single RX-W12 might struggle to remain composed without that extra room boost. In which case, adding a second mid-wall placed subwoofer would allow you to get the same output as your single corner-placed sub but with the benefit of faster, tighter sound.

Low-frequency output from a subwoofer is actually directional but the human ear is just not very good at discerning the direction. With a single woofer the sound wave will travel the length of the room, reflect back from the rear wall and create room nodes where the peaks and troughs of the outgoing and reflected sound waves meet. This effect is impossible to cure with any RoomEQ system because the more boost you put into the outgoing sound wave, the more energy is reflected. The two waves continue to cancel each other out and create 'null' nodes and standing waves. Moving your sub to different positions around the room will move the relative positions of these nodes.

By using more than one sub it is possible to minimise the standing waves and nodes, and better distribute them around your room – i.e. nowhere near your listening position. With two subwoofers producing the same sound from different points there will

be more interactions between sound waves but these interactions will be smaller. Think of the difference between dropping a single pebble into a tank of water (large radiating waves) and dropping in two pebbles a little way apart (lots of smaller interacting waves).

So the net result of two subwoofers is a smoother overall low-frequency response across more seating positions.

Largely for cosmetic reasons, a lot of twin-sub systems have the subwoofers placed on the front wall, either side of the centre speaker. While this will give a smoother response than a single sub, best placement is generally on opposing walls, either front/rear or left/right. This delivers the smoothest response over the largest area. The acoustic theory behind this effect is complex stuff, but if you fancy a fascinating not-too-technical insight we recommend reading *Sound Reproduction: Loudspeakers and Rooms* by Floyd E Toole.

So there you have it, two subs will give you smoother and tighter bass with more slam and impact than your single corner-positioned subwoofer – even if you keep the overall volume exactly the same. Another RX-W12 would be well worth the investment.

Getting gamma

I wonder if you could help regarding gamma response. What is the correct setting as I have various answers – e.g 2.2, 2.4, 2.5...

Richard, via e-mail

Gamma influences how much light is output by the display for a given video signal level – each display will have a characteristic 'gamma curve' that describes how the output varies from the lowest level to the highest. In addition, the human eye has a non-linear response to brightness changes – it's most sensitive at

low light levels. Gamma can affect the portrayal of detail and depth-perception, notably in the darker areas of the pictures. Most decent-quality displays will allow you to adjust the 'gamma response', usually via a series of onscreen graphic-equaliser style sliders that correspond to differing video levels – sometimes for each primary colour.

Other sets, yours included, offer a series of preset gamma responses. Lower gammas increase light output more quickly as the signal level is increased. When choosing a setting, the ambient light levels must be factored in. 2.2 (subjectively brighter) is the most common setting here, not least because sets are often designed to stand out in a showroom, and is recommended in environments where ambient light is plentiful. In darker rooms, which are better for home cinema viewing, a higher setting of 2.4 (subjectively darker) is recommended. The darker the surroundings, the less perceptible the video level (contrast) is and so the gamma must be higher to compensate. In brighter rooms the eye perceives more contrast, and so a lower gamma is needed as a compensatory measure ●

Hulk: When gamma settings go very wrong



Need advice with your system? Send an email to letters@homecinemachoice.com with 'AV Clinic' in the subject line. Do note: We can't guarantee to print/answer all your enquiries!

Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

Universal app

Following the letter in the last issue of *HCC* about HDMI-CEC control, it got me thinking – instead of individual manufacturers releasing iPhone apps to control their products, could we not have a universal app that would work with kit from a variety of brands? I have an app for my Onkyo AVR, one for my Philips TV, and one for my Sony BD deck. I'd rather have one that did it all.
Tom Mather, via email

Funnily enough, you've hit upon a possible free solution. Use one of the free apps to control your CEC-compatible HDMI-connected products, and you should be given at least basic control over the other CEC-compliant gear in your



system. If you want full control, though, or have equipment that lacks CEC support (most obviously, stuff that's connected by analogue means) then a universal remote is essential if you don't want to clutter up your coffee table with handsets. And wouldn't it indeed be handy if that iPhone could do the job? The good news is that a suitable

accessory is available. Known as the ThinkFlood RedEye Mini, it consists of an infra-red 'dongle' that plugs into the iPhone's headphone socket and a touchscreen remote-control app. The latter accesses an online infra-red code database run by ThinkFlood, and unless your equipment is particularly obscure you should be able to find the correct code needed

Remote apps: But is there a universal solution?

for RedEye Mini remote-operation – an advantage of this approach is that codes are added to the database when new equipment is introduced.

ThinkFlood's UK distributor is Armour Home. Among other things, this company handles QED interconnects, the wonderful little Q2 internet radio 'cube', Alphason turntables and Lutron lighting controllers. If your local hi-fi/home cinema emporium sells any of these items, they should be able to get hold of a RedEye Mini for you. Expect to pay around £50 for one, which will also work with the iPad and iPod Touch.

An alternative product that does a similar job with recent

Star Letter

With the recent demise of *DVD & Blu-ray Review* magazine, there will be a gap in the market. I wonder whether you would consider expanding the Playback section of *HCC* to compensate? I have always found your reviews to be well-balanced and informative; unfortunately, there are currently too few of them!

Ken Milton, via email

Thanks for your letter Ken. At the moment we're happy with the size of our Playback section – just because *DVD & Blu-ray Review* has closed down (a magazine that *HCC*'s The Beek was a regular contributor to) doesn't mean

there are more Blu-ray discs each month to check out!

Also, one person's 'too few' will always be another person's 'too many'. At present, we do largescale reviews of all the titles we feel are most relevant to *HCC* readers, and smaller reviews of other releases. Expanding the section would essentially mean going more in-depth on titles that we're not sure everyone will be considering purchasing – such as anime releases or the latest Adam Sandler slapstick.

That's not to say we wouldn't increase the

pagination of the Playback section in the future if we felt it was necessary – just that at the moment we feel it's about right.

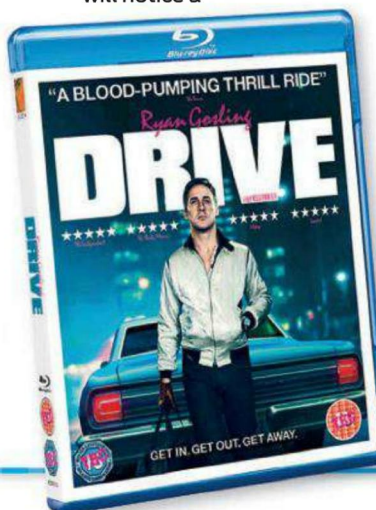
However, this issue you will notice a

slight change – we've introduced reviews of games that, again, we reckon are of interest to home cinema fans. After all, modern console titles are far removed from the platform adventures of yesteryear – games like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* are full-blown action epics with beautiful hi-def visuals and authentic surround sound.

And before anyone starts panicking – it's only two game reviews, not 20...

Winner: Star Letter-writer Ken Milton wins a copy of *Drive* on Blu-ray, courtesy of our pals at Icon Home Entertainment. It's available to buy from January 30, priced at £25 approx.

Can we have more software reviews?



Apple iProducts is the L5 Remote. Unfortunately, this \$60 American product is only sold online via its website (www.l5remote.com). L5 will sell to UK customers, but you'll have the additional shipping costs, import duties and waits to deal with.

Star Wars selection

Your 'Movie Awards' (HCC 203) contains one major flaw. You gave the *Star Wars Saga* 'Disc of the Year' but made such a fuss in your original review about it not offering everything it could do in terms of extra features. *Tron: Legacy*, in my opinion, is much more deserving. Oli, via email

Yes, we admit the *Star Wars Saga* Blu-ray boxset isn't perfect. And it's not only the lack of previously released extras – we have slight concerns regarding the picture quality of *Episode I* as well. However, it scooped Disc of the Year because we can't think of another title from the last 12 months that will have been on everyone's must-buy list, and the majority of its AV performance was nothing short of stunning. So shoot us.

Living in a box

I can see the attraction of 3D effects in a cinema where the screen takes up the whole of your vision – but am I the only person who finds that watching 3D on a TV is like looking at an object inside a box?

John Rankine, via email

John: you're definitely not the only person, no. Since 3DTVs first arrived in Spring 2009, much of the criticisms have been levelled at the inability of



Star Wars: not everyone's favourite BD release of 2011

smaller screens to adequately provide the sense of immersion that 3D cinemas can provide (as well as crosstalk issues, obviously). After all, our appetite for 3D at home comes from the success of 3D at the multiplex – films like *Avatar*, *Tron: Legacy* and *Toy Story 3D* have been the drivers of the format, not the tech-heavy screens from the likes of Samsung, Panasonic and the rest.

The good news is that you can now get a decent 3D projector for far less than some would have expected so early in the format's development. Optoma's HD33 (p64), which can deliver a screen size of 300in if you have a big enough room, can be snaffled for around £1,350.

Furthermore, Epson is offering a 3D projector for less than £1,000 – the EH-TW5900, which we will be reviewing shortly.

My Wi-Fi doesn't work

I tried to fit a Panasonic wireless LAN adaptor to my Panasonic

G20 flatscreen TV. I followed the instructions from my television manual but when I ask the TV to confirm it had found the device it says 'device not found' – although it does confirm my Wi-Fi details and that Wi-Fi is connected.

Can you advise what else I can try? Or do I need a different wireless LAN adaptor for this TV? It did state in the shop that this adaptor would work with my screen but it doesn't! Anthony, via email

Well, a Panasonic techie told us that the 'device not found' message applies to connecting an external HDD via USB, and has nothing to do with wireless dongles. If your TV confirms its Wi-Fi details, it would suggest that the wireless connection to your router is working – if this is the case, then the dongle must also be working. All rather confusing, and so it would probably be best to go back to the beginning. The correct Wi-Fi adaptor for this TV has the Panasonic model

number DY-WL10E-K, and others are not guaranteed to work. Plug this device into the USB socket, and from the setup menu select 'network setup'. The top item (network type) is 'wired'. Change this to 'wireless'. The second item, 'access point settings', should now be accessible – select the option that applies to your wireless network.

If your network router supports WPS (Wi-Fi Protected Setup), then your job is made easier. Press your network device's WPS button, and then press the WPS/connect button shown in the TV menu. If your network doesn't support this technology, instead hit the menu's 'search for networks' button. A list of available networks in the vicinity should be displayed. This will include your neighbour's networks – so be sure to select yours! If you're not using any security on your network, then you can connect. If you are, you'll need to enter your Wi-Fi encryption key before connecting. A 'connection test' (the menu's fifth option) should then complete successfully.

If you have any further problems, give the Panasonic customer support line a call on 0844 844 3899.

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington BR6 6BG or email us at letters@homecinemachoice.com. Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive.



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REVIEWS

→ **Hardware highlights** PHILIPS 46in LED TV with Moth Eye technology
 Q ACOUSTICS 5.1 sub/sat system DENON Seven-channel AVR with AirPlay OPTOMA Entry-level Full
 HD 3D projector SONY ITB Freeview+HD PVR and BDP-S185 Blu-ray player CANTON Floorstanding
 speaker array VIVADI Media server and client solution VELODYNE 12in subwoofer AND MORE!

3D goes large

Samsung's 64in plasma is its biggest TV yet. Can this monster screen deliver on its promise of immersive thrills? Turn to page 68 to find out...

HCC Ratings key

Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

Moth-eyed magician

Philips has turned to the humble moth for inspiration with its latest TV, giving **John Archer** a new-found respect for our fluttery friends

Philips can usually be depended on to deliver a genuine innovation or two with every new range of TVs. But this year it's outdone itself by introducing the first commercially-released TV equipped with a Moth Eye filter.

The TV in question is the 46PFL9706T. And so unique is it that not even the larger model from the same range, the 52PFL9706T, benefits from the same tech.

I explain in more detail what the Moth Eye filter is over the page – but the bottom line is that it's a new filter capable of hugely reducing on-screen reflections; so much so that the 46PFL9706T claims a mind-boggling contrast ratio of 150,000,000:1.

Look but don't touch

The moment you get Philips' 46PFL9706T out of its box you know you're in for something different. There's a plastic cover stuck to it, with a label warning you in no uncertain terms to avoid direct skin contact with the screen. And this is very sound advice, for if you do touch the screen, you'll cause the filter to look streaky and lined. A situation only remedied via the special lotion Philips includes with the set.

Yet once you've got the 46PFL9706T set up and told your kids that there will be no more *In The*

Night Garden if they prod your new TV's screen, it immediately becomes something to admire rather than fret over. It truly is handsome in its metallic silver bezel complete with rounded corners. And that's before you even switch it on and clock Philips' trademark Ambilight system, which casts immersive coloured light from three of the TV's edges.

While the Moth Eye filter might be its headline-grabbing trick, this set also benefits from the latest version of Philips' Perfect Pixel HD processing engine. This is roughly twice as powerful as last year's Perfect Pixel HD system, allowing it to deliver, for the first time, its advantages (including its motion clarity processing) in 3D as well as 2D.

The set's 3D capabilities are of the Full HD active shutter variety, and at the time of writing you get two pairs of 3D glasses free. Philips has also provided a 2D-to-3D conversion system, as well as a tool for adjusting the depth of 3D images.

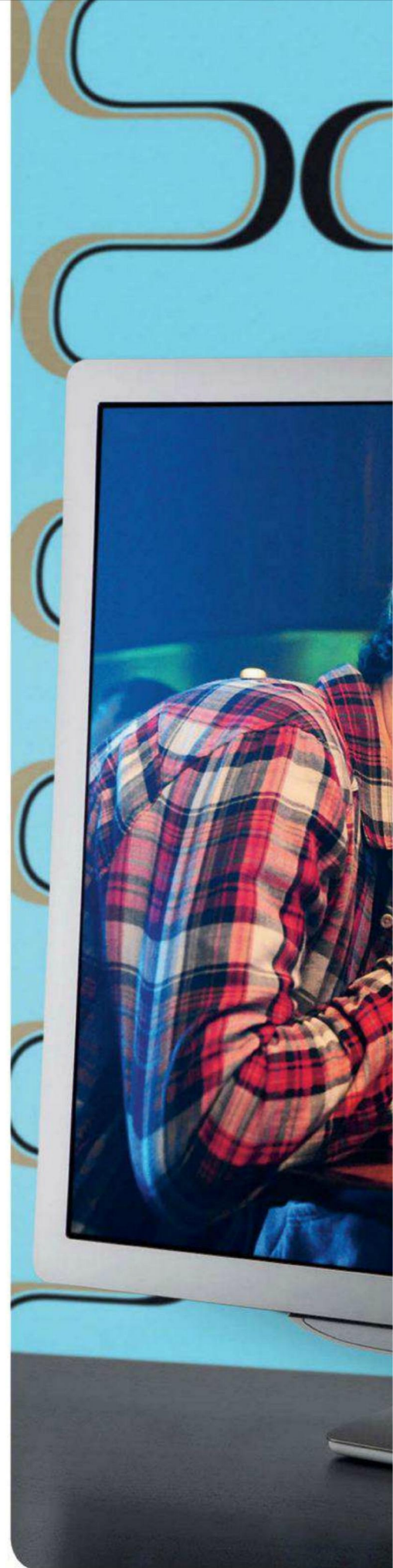
Intriguingly, Philips uses the 46PFL9706T's 3D capability to let two console gamers enjoy full-screen playback of split-screen games by blowing up each player's half and delivering the resulting full-screen images via the separate 'eye streams' of the 3D signal. A button on the glasses switches them between 'normal' 3D and split-screen gaming mode.

Direct approach

There are two more areas where the 46PFL9706T does its damndest to justify its £2,300 price tag. First, its pictures are illuminated by direct LED lighting with local dimming via 224 separately controllable LED >



New look: Philips has tweaked the design of its handset for its new range



AV/CV

PRODUCT: 46in LCD TV with direct LED lighting, online functionality and unique Moth Eye filter

POSITION: The flagship 46in screen in Philips' new range

PEERS: Sony KDL-46HX923; LG 'Nano' 47LW980T

Philips' 46PFL9706T offers
superb colours and contrast

HOME
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52 REVIEWS

zones. My experience suggests this configuration should deliver a premium picture performance, especially where colour and contrast are concerned.

The final big feature of the well-specified 46PFL9706T is its multimedia capability. Built-in Wi-Fi means the TV can easily access files on a networked DLNA PC, or go online with Philips' Net TV service.

Net TV is a solid offering, thanks to its attractive interface and open web browser, complete with a practical text input system. It's good to see, too, that Philips has now got the BBC iPlayer among its services, with other key apps including CNBC Real Time, Box Office 365, The Cartoon Network, Twitter, Facebook, Viewster, and the Aupeo internet radio 'server'. Overall, though, I'm a little disappointed by how little Net TV has progressed from its 2010 iteration.

The 46PFL9706T houses two USB ports, through which you can play a good, if not definitive, set of multimedia file formats, or record from the Freeview HD tuner to USB HDDs. And yes, I did say Freeview HD; there's no repeat of the no-Freeview-HD debacle of the brand's previous TV range.

Unusually for a TV, the 46PFL9706T's speakers are built into its heavy-duty stand – a stand that doubles as a wall mount if you prefer. I'm surprised to say that this innovation results in a highly respectable soundstage, with plenty of dynamic range, an open mid-range, good treble detailing and even a bit of bass.

Pro-grade pictures

As is normal with a premium Philips TV, the 46PFL9706T lets you tweak almost every part of the powerful processing engine. What's more, for the first time Philips has secured the endorsement of the Imaging Science Foundation, proving to AV enthusiasts that its newest flatscreen has all the tools necessary to be professionally calibrated.

It takes all of 10 seconds watching the 46PFL9706T to realise that the combination of the Moth Eye filter, direct LED lighting and extravagantly potent picture-processing help it produce what are, at times, the best pictures I've seen on an LCD TV.

The screen's contrast ability is nothing short of spectacular, with inky, deep yet natural blacks sitting side by side with phenomenally punchy, vibrant whites and colours. The black level response in particular



The eyes have it...

Why Philips looked to the natural world for its latest tech development

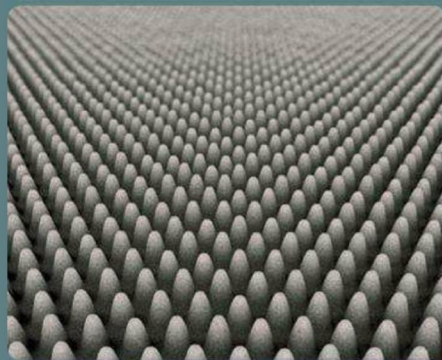
If you'd asked me a year ago to pick an animal which might one day change the face of AV technology, I certainly wouldn't have picked a moth.

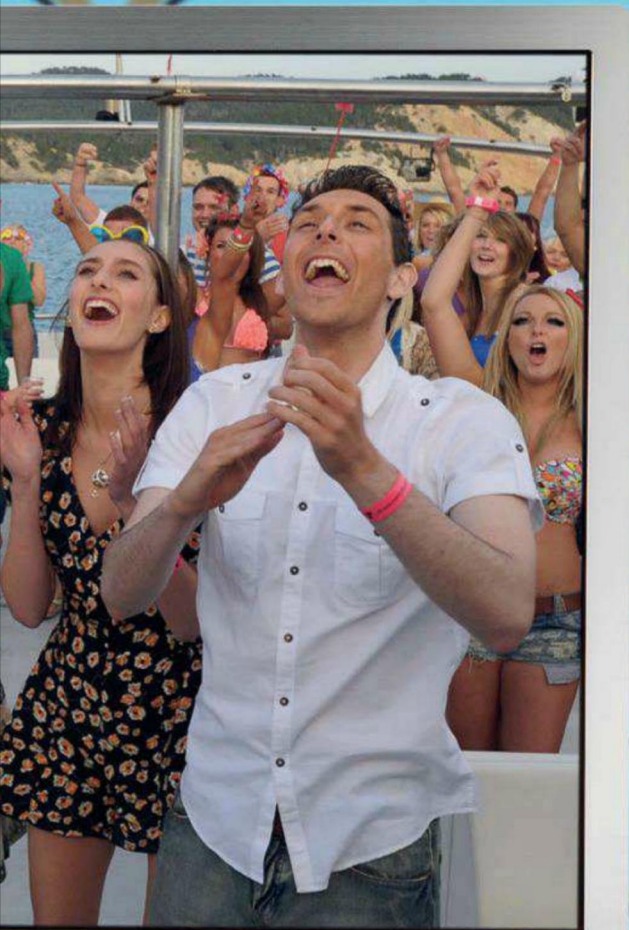
In fact, I've always tended to consider moths to be pretty low down the animal 'chain'; a notch above dung beetles, maybe, but essentially just a much more irritating and dull-looking version of butterflies, with a penchant for eating clothes.

The thing is, though, that moths come out at night. And because they come out at night and are a bit, well, flimsy, they need to get about without their eyes glinting and drawing the attention of predators. So evolution came up with a solution whereby the surface of moths' eyes are covered in light-refracting 'nanostructures', which 'soak up' light so that moth's eyes hardly glint at all.

Transporting these principals into the TV world means creating a special filter also smothered in nanostructures (pictured), and attaching this to

the front of a TV – resulting in a screen that's massively less prone to reflecting light than any other type to date. And, as we have discovered, the results of this filter are so good they have to be seen to be believed.





Sound base:

Philips has incorporated the TV's speakers into its stand

even goes deeper than some of this year's plasma TVs.

Given that this exceptional black level prowess is down to local dimming technology, there's always the chance that there won't be much shadow detail in pictures, and that bright objects will appear to have a cloudy halo around them when they

'Contrast is spectacular, with inky, deep blacks sitting alongside punchy vibrant whites and colours'

appear against dark backgrounds. But actually, so sophisticated is the TV's dimming engine that shadow detailing looks great, while the 'haloing' problem is so minor you scarcely ever notice it – unless you're sat off to the TV's sides, anyway.

Then there's the Moth Eye filter to consider. Thanks to this you can see practically no light reflected on the screen at all. This means all the light from the LEDs can burst into your room without any dilution – even in a brightly-lit room. Awesome.

The 46PFL9706T's pictures are further notable for their outstanding sharpness – HD pictures somehow feels even crisper than the set's Full HD pixel count should deliver.

And the new picture-processing engine is comfortably Philips' best to date. It delivers its bundle of improvements without generating as many unwanted side effects as earlier versions. This is particularly true with the Perfect Natural Motion system, which can eliminate judder and motion blur without – on its lowest-power setting – causing previously seen problems like areas of distortion around moving objects.

Meanwhile, those who want to avoid this processing altogether will be pleased to know that the 46PFL9706T's natural response time is pretty good, too.

With the 46PFL9706T's 2D performance raising hopes of spectacular 3D, I donned a pair of Philips' lightweight new glasses and felt a bit disappointed. The set's 3D pictures clearly suffer with – you guessed it – crosstalk noise.

This double ghosting is common with many active shutter 3D TVs, of course, but given that Philips claims to have really gone to town in trying to combat the problem – even making sure the screen benefits from standardised heat distribution – the amount of crosstalk on show was a bit of an unwelcome surprise.

There's a solution of sorts in the 'lower depth' 3D setting. But as this also massively reduces the image's sense of depth, you'll begin to wonder whether you should bother at all.

Making the crosstalk all the more unfortunate are substantial 3D strengths such as exceptional brightness and colour-richness for an active 3D picture, along with excellent Full HD detailing.

Flat-o-vision finesse

Looking back over my time with the 46PFL9706T, its crosstalk problems do make it a slightly problematic purchase if you're really into 3D. If 2D is your main attraction, though, then you can part with your £2,300 safe in the knowledge that the 46PFL9706T's pictures are at times nothing short of revolutionary

→ Analysis



GUI: Philips' Net TV portal uses big icons and bright colours – the rest of the menus are more text-heavy

Power consumption: We measured an average consumption of 131W watching *Tangled* – but Ambilight will have been partly responsible for this quite high figure

Killer feature: Contrast – that 150m:1 claim doesn't seem too outlandish...

→ Specifications

3D: YES Active shutter

Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080

Tuner: YES Freeview HD; analogue; CI slot

Connections: 4 x HDMI; 1 x component; 1 x D-Sub PC input; 1 x Scart; 2 x USB; 1 x SD card; 1 x optical digital audio; 1 x phono stereo audio; 1 x Ethernet

Sound: 2 x 20W

Brightness: 500cd/m2

Contrast ratio: 150,000,000:1

Dimensions (off stand): 1083(w) x 660(h) x 39(d)mm

Weight (off stand): 16kg

Features: Built-in wi-fi; USB multimedia playback and recording; direct LED backlight with local dimming; 1200Hz-like system; Perfect Pixel HD processing; Ambilight (three sides); Moth-eye filter; Net TV online functionality; dual-screen gaming; two pairs of 3D glasses included



HCC VERDICT

Philips 46PFL9706T → £2,300
Approx → Supplier: www.philips.co.uk
Tel: 0800 331 6015

Highs: Stunning 2D picture quality; lovely design; massive feature count; good sound quality

Lows: Costly for a 46in TV; crosstalk with 3D; take care with the screen

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

A sub/sat system with elegance

Adrian Justins wraps his ears, and eyes, around the latest compact package from the freelance engineering team at Q Acoustics

The unusually shaped subwoofer can be wall-mounted



AV/CV**PRODUCT:**
5.1 lifestyle
speaker system**POSITION:**
Only sibling to
cheaper, uglier
Q2000 system**PEERS:**
Scandyna
Micropods;
Canton
Movie CD 105

About five years ago Armour Home ceased distributing Mission speakers and made the questionable decision to design and produce its own speaker brand. Q Acoustics was born.

The company operates in a somewhat unconventional manner for a speaker maker. It minimises its risks by engaging designers and engineers as and when they are needed on an ad-hoc freelance basis. Yet so far, the story has been one of steady success. The brand introduced Q AV, the world's first speakers to feature 'BMR'

(Balanced Mode Radiator) drive units, licensed from NXT, and achieved acclaim for the sonic prowess of its Q1000 and Q2000 systems; highly impressive, albeit box-shaped. The latest challenge for the company has been to design a contemporary-looking home cinema speaker system that does the business with multichannel movie soundtracks, and satisfies the aural demands of music enthusiasts.

Armour has high expectations for the Q7000. As its cuddly PR manager Steve Reichert me whilst decanting this 5.1 array from its packaging,

'Designing from a blank piece of paper is a distinct advantage. We have no baggage and we're not tied to any particular system. This means we are able to exploit the very latest thinking and improvements in technology. Every single component has been designed specifically to do the job we need and the designers are the leading guys in their field.'

For reasons of commercial sensitivity Reichert won't say who Armour engaged to technically design the Q7000 but I wouldn't be surprised to find some ex-Mission noodlers involved. He also reveals his own involvement as the man with the 'golden ears' who ensures the blueprint translates into the sonic performance and presentation that Armour wants.

The system's catwalk looks speak for themselves. The aluminium cabinets really are exquisite, beautifully finished in piano gloss black (also available in an even more contemporary white). They're solid, sumptuous and sport more curves than Beyoncé, but are arguably marred by the two-tone Q logo that's worked in to the side of each speaker.

The oblong subwoofer is finished to an equally high standard, and has a remarkable construction, featuring a 10in ultra long-throw bass driver that fires internally against a heavy, rigid 'sounding board'. This surface deflects the bass notes through slim grilles located on the top and both sides of the unit. The oblong design provides greater placement flexibility than your traditional square box.

Access to the hidden connections is achieved by removing the sounding board cover using an Allen key. There are line-level inputs, plus high-level inputs for use with AVRs bereft of a dedicated subwoofer output. The controls are on the top and include a powering-up sensitivity switch and LED status light.

General assembly

I tested the Q7000 in a 5.1 configuration, consisting of four full-range 7000LRs, a 7000C centre and the 7000S sub, but Armour also sells 7000LRs by the pair. They come with solid built-in table-top stands that can be swivelled into instant wall-mounts or tilted upwards. A rather gorgeous floor stand for the satellites, priced at £125 a pair, complete with practical cable management, is also available.

The clean look is maintained by hiding the high-quality spring-action

'The Q7000 system is solid, sumptuous and sports more curves than Beyoncé'





Out of sight:

To get at the subwoofer's connections, you need to remove the 'sounding board'

terminals discreetly in the base. A small gripe: the cable aperture is narrow, making it tricky to thread decent quality speaker cable through.

The cabinet grilles are fine-meshed yet sturdy, and can be removed to reveal the three drive units – two 3in mid/bass drivers either side of a bespoke 1in ring radiator tweeter.

The enclosures are cast in aluminium and damped internally to eliminate cabinet resonance. Lightweight coated paper is used for

'Avatar offers a great workout across the entire dynamic range. This setup passes with flying colours'

the cone material, which combines with a rubber surround and enables the speaker to deliver, says Armour Home, a wide dynamic range, low distortion and fast transients.

Depth charge

With the Q7000 running through an Onkyo TX-NR709 receiver I settled down to enjoy some sonic thrills – and straight away, I was impressed by the power and depth of the

soundstage generated by such pint-sized pots. Close your eyes and you might think these are coffin-sized floorstanders.

Despite the size of these cabinets, there's no lack of control or definition, with the system taking the disparate effects of *Monsters vs Aliens*' DTS-HD MA soundtrack in its stride. Rustling wind noises float gently across the rears whilst dialogue sings out of the centre. The collapsing bridge scene is handled with aplomb and the subwoofer disperses LFE with agility. However, it must be gently cajoled into not stealing the show by carefully tweaking the volume.

Taking things up another notch, *Avatar*'s sensational DTS-HD MA mix is a real knock-out. The scene when Jake Sully's intellectually-challenged Avatar runs through the Pandoran forest at night causing havoc is a delightful multichannel symphony of humming insect sounds, distant bird calls, raking foliage, roaring beasts and the whooshing of Sully's fire torch. In other words, a great workout across the entire dynamic range, and one which the Q7000 passes with flying colours; the system can really pick out subtle individual sounds. This is also shown by the reproduction of an often unheard effect in *Fantastic Four*'s DTS mix. When the suicidal man is scared back by the Thing and falls on to the bridge, there's a very brief zipping noise that is usually lost amongst the over-dominant cacophony of vehicles and background music. Not here.

But all systems have their limits and the Q7000's is shown by the immense crashing sound when the huge truck ploughs in to the Thing's shoulder. It simply feels underwhelming compared with beefier systems.

The system bounces back with orchestrated music. I closed my eyes and listened to Hilary Hahn's superb SACD recording of *The Lark Ascending*. I was transported to the pit of the Royal Festival Hall, every instrument distinct and precise, even the sound of Hahn's bow drawing down the violin's strings.

Proud performer

Q Acoustics can be rightly proud of the Q7000, which is proof that its freelance approach to speaker design can yield brilliant results. In fact, I reckon you'll be hard pressed to find the same level of performance from any other designer 5.1 system at this price. I'm beginning to wonder: do I really need floorstanders? ●

→ Specifications

Q Acoustics Q7000 LR

Drive Units: 2 x 3in long-throw neodymium bass drivers; 1 x 1in neodymium high-frequency ring radiator tweeter

Enclosure: Two-way, sealed

Frequency Response: 95Hz-20KHz

Sensitivity: 85dB

Power Handling: 15-100W

Dimensions (inc table stand): 100(w) x 240(h) x 160(d)mm

Weight: 1.6kg

Q Acoustics Q7000 centre

Drive Units: 2 x 3in long-throw neodymium bass drivers; 1 x 1in neodymium high-frequency ring radiator tweeter

Enclosure: Two-way, sealed

Frequency Response: 95Hz-20KHz

Sensitivity: 85dB

Power Handling: 15-100W

Dimensions (inc table stand): 207(w) x 115(h) x 160(d)mm

Weight: 1.6kg

Q Acoustics Q7000 subwoofer

Drive Unit: 1 x 10in high-excursion

Enclosure: MDF, 'infinite baffle'

Frequency Response: 30Hz-220Hz

On board power: 250W

Dimensions: 510(w) x 370(h) x 215(d)mm

Weight: 18kg

Connections: 2 x phono line-level inputs; 2 x speaker level inputs



HCC VERDICT

Q Acoustics Q7000 → £800 Approx

→ Supplier: www.armourhe.co.uk

→ Tel: 01279 501111

Highs: Classy design; high-quality build; good scale, control and dynamic range

Lows: Centre may be too tall for some TV stands; over-keen sub needs taming and has tricky connections

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Easy-going AV

Denon's AVR-1912 offers a smooth sound as well as its headline AirPlay functionality. But **Danny Phillips** doesn't always like it that way

Apple's nifty music streaming feature, AirPlay, is slowly finding its way onto more and more home cinema products, and Denon's AVR-1912 is another one to add to the list. This makes it dead simple to play music from iPods, iPhones and iPads, but with DLNA-certified streaming and USB playback also on board the rest of your devices are in safe hands. Denon hasn't dubbed this AVR the 'Everyceiver' for nothing.

But, of course, home cinema is its bread and butter, and for that purpose it's a 7.1-channel affair offering a claimed 90W of power per channel. The AVR-1912 attempts to bring you Denon's celebrated sound quality in a wallet-friendly midrange machine, and at £450 it's the brand's most affordable network-enabled receiver to date. But with stiff competition in this sector from Yamaha and Onkyo, it has a real bunfight on its hands.

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
7.1-channel
AV receiver

POSITION:
Below the
AVR-2312, above
the AVR-1612

PEERS:
Yamaha
RX-V671;
Onkyo
TX-NR609

Denon certainly hasn't skimped on build quality at this price, with rigid, burly bodywork designed to quell vibration. The look goes for quietly elegant over drop-dead gorgeous, with a clean fascia that curves gently at the top and a large display window dominating the front vista. Much of the front clutter is neatly blended into nooks and crannies, while auxiliary inputs comprise composite, analogue stereo and a USB port that supports direct iPod connection.



A subtle curve to the AVR-1912's fascia softens the blow of Denon's black box design

Being a lower-midrange amp, you don't get the usual telephone exchange of sockets on the back. Sure, six HDMI v1.4 inputs and an ARC-compatible output are ample, but other numbers are relatively low – two digital audio inputs, a few video ports and no multichannel analogue inputs or pre-outs.

And with rival products from Onkyo offering 4K upscaling to futureproof themselves against the next generation of hi-def TVs, it's surprising to discover that the AVR-1912 features no HDMI upscaling at all. It'll convert video from any input and chuck it out via HDMI as is, but if you want to up-res SD content you'll have to rely on your source player or TV.

The AVR-1912 does at least offer with a solid array of networking features, but they're only accessible over Ethernet – there's no Wi-Fi support. AirPlay is joined by the aforementioned DLNA streaming from networked devices and format support includes MP3, WMA, AAC,

FLAC HD and WAV audio, plus JPEG photos, all of which can also be played via the USB port. Napster, Flickr and Last.fm subscribers can use the Denon to stream music and photos, too.

The Apple love-in continues with the ability to control the AVR-1912 using an iPhone, iPod touch or iPad using the dedicated app. Great news if your coffee table's already creaking under the weight of all those zappers. Android device owners are catered for as well.

A head for heights

Naturally, the AVR-1912 decodes Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio as any £450 AVR should, but less expected is the appearance of Dolby Pro Logic IIz. Love it or loathe it, this vertical surround tech can be a fun feature with the right material, although you'll need to sacrifice the surround backs to get that front height boost – and find two extra speakers, for that matter. Alternatively, the assignable power

Brush up: Denon's easy-to-use handset has a neat finish



amp allows you to drive a second zone or bi-wire speakers.

Lurking beneath the surface is a SHARC 32-bit DSP chip serving up the usual array of presets for you to bypass. I've never seen the point in adding superfluous echo to my music – if I want to hear what a 'Rock Arena' sounds like, I'll buy some Foo Fighters tickets. But if you like them, you'll also find Jazz Club, Matrix and Virtual modes for your delectation, as well as Mono and Virtual for movie use.

Much more useful is the inclusion of Audyssey's automatic calibration mode, MultEQ. It may not hit the nail on the head in every room, but my experience with it has been generally positive. It batters your lugholes with test tones, taking readings from up to eight positions with the supplied mic to ensure the best balance no matter where you sit. But if you don't like the results, corrections can be made manually in the detailed speaker setup menu.

The installation wheels are further greased by Denon's Setup Wizard, ➤



which holds your hand while setting key options like network and inputs. It's ostensibly aimed at fresh-faced newcomers but even hardened audiophiles may appreciate a little leg-up here and there.

The presence of onscreen menus makes operation a cakewalk, although the GUI feels like a cut 'n' shut job. In some areas, like the media playback menus, the look is fresh and modern, with jazzed-up fonts and cute graphics; in others, namely the setup menu, it's like going back to the '90s. This inconsistent design is a tad clumsy, but in truth it poses no problems as the structure is logical and the options are clear.

The remote keeps its nose clean, too. It's packed from top to toe with buttons, but the positioning of core controls like the multidirectional menu keys, input selection and volume make it intuitive to operate. The Quick Select keys are useful, while its brushed black finish is a neat touch.

Networking niggles

I won't pretend it was a bed of roses getting the AVR-1912 to work on my network. After several attempts it simply wouldn't recognise my Windows 7 laptop. A call to Denon HQ... nothing. Extensive fiddling around in Windows... nothing. Then bang, magically it appeared. Great, but it's hardly the plug-and-play simplicity the DLNA promises. AirPlay has never looked so appealing – here, Apple's system works beautifully.

Internet radio is clear and stable, and after trying out some WAV and FLAC files from USB I was awestruck by the clarity.

As for movies, the AVR-1912 is the sort of smooth operator Sade warned you about. With a Blu-ray disc the sound is crisp and composed, projecting its clean, snappy effects into a spacious soundstage.

I fed it *Inception* on Blu-ray and the movie highlighted the Denon's

Gone digital:

Plenty of HDMI's, but not much else

ability to shift from quiet, palpable dread to full-on action mode in the blink of an eye. The opening scenes show the AVR-1912 at its breathless best, lending closely-controlled bass weight to the water pouring through the walls and impressive snap to falling rubble and timber.

Effects are steered with delightful fluidity, midrange frequencies are robustly and confidently delivered and high-frequency presentation is simply beautiful, resulting in an open, airy sound with no straining at high

'With movies, Denon's AVR-1912 is the kind of smooth operator that Sade warned you about'

volumes. Dialogue reproduction is masterful, demonstrating a fine understanding for the nuances of the human voice.

But there's something about the AVR-1912's performance that doesn't get the adrenalin flowing like some of its competitors. The sound is perhaps too polished, too restrained, lacking the extra drive and potency needed to get the pictures on the wall shaking. It's certainly a sound you enjoy, but I'm looking for one you can't live without.

Not for everyone

I've come to expect so much from Denon over the years that it's disappointing not to be blown away by the AVR-1912. Sure the smooth, mature sound is a real feat of audio engineering, and if you crave finesse over firepower then it might be the receiver for you.

However, if it's pure unbridled excitement you're after, then give the Yamaha RX-V671, Pioneer VSX-2021 or Onkyo TX-NR609 a whirl – and if you do you're likely to get more features, connections and a smoother networking experience into the bargain.

→Analysis



GUI: The AVR-1912's GUI moves between colourful menus and stark, text-heavy pages – hardly a unified user experience

Power consumption: Idling, the AVR-1912 uses around 45W. With 5.1-channel movie soundtracks it never rose higher than 135W

Killer feature: The AirPlay music streaming feature is faultless

→Specifications

Dolby TrueHD: YES and DD PLIIz
DTS-HD Master Audio: YES

THX: NO

Multichannel audio: YES 7 x 90W

Multichannel input: NO

Multiroom: YES Zone 2

Connections: 6 x HDMI v1.4 inputs; 1 x HDMI v1.4 output; 1 x component input; 3 x composite inputs; 1 x optical digital audio input; 1 x coaxial digital audio input; 6 x analogue stereo audio inputs; 1 x Ethernet; 1 x USB

Video upscaling: NO A surprising omission

Dimensions: 435(w) x 167(h) x 382(d)mm

Weight: 10.2kg

Features: Apple AirPlay support; Napster, Last.fm & Flickr access; DLNA media streaming; internet radio; assignable power amp, bi-amping; Dolby Pro Logic IIz; SHARC 32-bit floating point-DSP (seven modes); Cinema Equaliser; Audyssey MultEQ XT; Dynamic EQ and Dynamic Volume; 192kHz/24-bit DAC; Pure Direct mode; Setup Wizard; onscreen GUI; Denon Remote App; Compressed Audio Restorer; direct iPod connection via USB; MP3, WMA, AAC, FLAC-HD, WAV and JPEG playback



HCC VERDICT

Denon AVR-1912 → £450 Approx

→ Supplier: www.denon.co.uk

→ Tel: 02890 279830

Highs: Crisp, polished performance; built-in AirPlay; build quality

Lows: Lacks the gusto of midrange rivals; no video scaling; mixed GUI; skimps on connections

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Hi-def hoarder

With its huge hard drive, Sony's latest Freeview+HD PVR is a telly addict's dream. But, reports **Steve May**, it might not suit everyone's needs

Do you want a digital TV recorder that bundles all manner of extra gadgetry onboard, such as Blu-ray player, Smart IPTV functionality and media streaming? Or do you want a simple PVR with a big enough hard drive to let you Series Link without fear?

If you're cool with the latter, then Sony's SVR-HDT1000 certainly fits the bill. This Freeview+HD PVR wields a massive 1TB drive, enough for 125 hours of hi-def, but rather surprisingly cocks a snoot at the brand's own online content portal. Given that both Samsung and Panasonic have built 'net functions into their recorder rivals, this omission is somewhat surprising.

What the SVR-HDT1000 lacks in functionality it makes up for in refinement. This is a splendidly built little box with impeccable manners. It runs with whisper silence.

Unfortunately, it lacks any kind of graphical display. There's no channel numbers or clock, just a blue-white light that resembles the glare of an anaemic Cylon. The front panel sports a USB port hidden behind a ferociously difficult to unplug bung, plus two little LED indicators which glow red when it's recording.

Backside connectivity includes Ethernet, but the SVR-HDT1000 won't stream media across a LAN. The network connection is there as part of its Freeview HD specification,

and is designed for Freeview's IPTV channels and BBC iPlayer (although this functionality has not yet been activated).

The user interface of the SVR-HDT1000 has graphical echoes of the brand's TV and BD XrossMediaBar, but it's not identical. This is not bad thing if you're a Sony fan, as similarities between GUIs can leave you confused as to what bit of kit you're actually looking at.

All TV recordings can be found in the obtusely named Title List, while Guide pulls up the standard Freeview EPG. All the expected Freeview+ embellishments are here, including Series Linking and hi-def programme prompts. The PVR can record two

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
1TB Freeview+
HD hard drive
recorder

POSITION:
Sony's highest
capacity PVR
sits above a
lookalike 500GB
version, the
SVR-HDT500

PEERS:
Humax
HDR-FoxT2 1TB;
Samsung
BD-DT7800



Looks familiar:

This typical Sony handset throws up few surprises



channels simultaneously, and will allow you to watch while it records (here called Chase Play).

Rather frustratingly, the PVR is slow to react to plugged-in USBs, and once recognised they're sluggish to navigate. The deck will display JPEGs and play MP3s, although presentation of the latter is mundane, with no album art or visual niceties. The principal use of this USB input would appear to be to move content onto the SVR-HDT1000's hard drive. This allows you to put that huge disc capacity to some serious use, by creating a PVR jukebox. The Title List partition can then be filtered by content type. There is no video file playback from USB.

Delivering detail

Image quality is excellent. HD material offers the same level of detail as the original transmission, and comes with no additional artefacts. Lower bitrate SD fare enjoys a similar level of clarity, with obvious caveats. This is a highly transparent recorder.

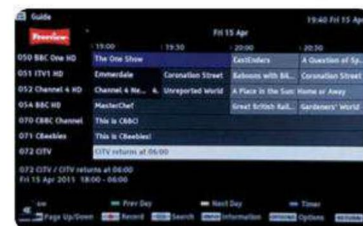
As a sop to eco-viewers, the recorder can be put into a low power consumption Standby mode so frugal it disables the tuner. This means that if one member of the

family has programmed a little bit of late night entertainment, another could foil the recording by popping the deck into Standby. Personally, I suggest the savings to be had are so minimal it's just not worth the possible inconvenience.

Another useful party trick of this Sony is its ability to back up its recordings to an external hard drive. This is handy for several reasons: even if that cavernous drive does fill up, you can archive off material to free up some room. It also means that you can save complete seasons of TV shows, or broadcast movies, for your own viewing pleasure. Given the low price of external drives, this is actually a cost effective way of building a personal library of HD content. Bear in mind that the recordings made by this Sony are compliant with the XFS file system and can only be played back on this particular recorder.

Overall, the SVR-HDT1000 is a highly competent digital TV recorder. Well built, generously specified but not overburdened with features. There's purity about its design that as a confirmed telly addict I can thoroughly appreciate. Do I need all my hardware to be networking savvy and Smart? No. But you might...

→ Analysis



GUI: Sony's Freeview EPG is easy to navigate, but a little bland

Power consumption: We measured an average consumption of 22W when recording to the SVR-HDT1000's hard drive

Killer feature: Importing material to the HDD means the SVR-HDT1000 can be used as media jukebox, and you can categorise your content

→ Specifications

HDD: YES 1TB
Tuner: YES 2 x Freeview+HD DVB-T/T2
Connections: 1 x HDMI v1.3; 1 x coaxial digital audio; 1 x Ethernet; 2 x USB; 1 x phono AV
Dimensions: 320(w) x 54.5(h) x 231(d) mm
Weight: 2.2kg
Features: Eight-day EPG; Series Link; Chase Play; MP3/JPEG media playback from USB; Jukebox functionality; Archiving to external HDD; Picture-in-picture



Only a thin blue light tells you the SVR-HDT1000 is switched on



HCC VERDICT

Sony SVR-HDT1000 → £350 Approx

→ Supplier: www.sony.co.uk

→ Tel: 08705 111 999

Highs: Huge HDD; quiet operation; archiving to external HDD; music and photo jukebox functionality

Lows: No smart portal or video playback on USB; no on-box display

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



At less than £1,400, the HD33 could be many people's gateway to Full HD 3D projection

Optoma unleashes bigscreen 3D

The sub-£1,400 HD33 offers a tempting mix of dramatic 3D and sweet design. Home cinema frugalists have never had it so good, argues **Steve May**

Don't be surprised if you're told you'll have to go on a waiting list to get an Optoma HD33. According to a little birdie in the trade, demand for this model is outstripping supply across Europe – and having now lived with one for a few weeks, I'm not surprised. Typically selling for less than £1,400, they represent ridiculously good value for bigscreen aficionados

– particularly when you consider that a year ago you couldn't get a Full HD 3D PJ for less than £3K.

Affordable the HD33 may be, but it still cuts a fine figure. The finish is high grade, with a white gloss cabinet that's very a la mode. While there are on-body controls, you'll not feel compelled to use them. The PJ ships with a sympathetically styled remote control, backlit by cool blue LEDs.

The HD33 is surprisingly compact: at just 122mm tall it'll not obstruct anyone's view when parked on a coffee table, and given that it weighs just 4.5kg, ceiling mounting is a very practical proposition.

Home cinema only

Unlike its chief rival, the Epson EH-TW6000, this Optoma does not feature any in-built audio



Lighten up:
The supplied handset is backlit and uncluttered

Active-vision:
Optoma's Active 3D spec look a bit retro



system. It's a home theatre projector through and through, and expects to be partnered with a separate noise maker. To that end, video connectivity can be considered more than adequate: there are two HDMI v1.4a inputs, plus component, PC and regular phono. To assist in more elaborate systems, there's also an RS232 control port and 12V trigger, useful if you want to sync the HD33 to an electric screen (power up and the screen comes down, and vice versa).

Interestingly, Optoma's entry-level 3D projector uses an RF rather than IR sync transmitter for its 3D glasses. This has the advantage that no line-of sight is required, and the little short-leash RF transmitter, which has to be plugged into the projector, can be secured wherever is convenient.

The general operating noise of the HD33 is low, but not whisper-quiet. Optoma rates it at 27dB. My advice is to keep the projector on its Standard lamp setting whenever possible. Select AI, which alters the light

output to counter any ambient lighting, or Bright, and fan noise escalates. Single-chip DLP models like this often sound louder than their LCD rivals, because not only is the fan actively cooling the light engine, the spinning colour wheel adds its own unique pitch to the mix. To put this into context, I didn't find it intrusive at all when used with a full-throttle home cinema system, although in isolation I could clearly hear an uneven whir.

Plonk and play

You won't need to reserve yourself a great deal of time to set up Optoma's HD33. The provided manual focus and zoom wheel allow you to quickly frame the image, and there's keystone correction to square things up if you're not able to get accurately aligned. It's always best to make minimal electronic

corrections, not least because you'll lose picture information at the edge of the screen if you keystone too aggressively.

The projector's image range is good. You'll need around four metres to throw a 120-inch picture, while a 100-inch screen can be created at about 3.5m.

Once plumbed in and fitted to my screen, the HD33's pictures proved sharper than Freddy Krueger's cutlery draw. Single-chip DLPs have a well-founded reputation for clarity, and this model conforms happily to the stereotype. It positively twinkles in the company of a good hi-def source.

As you might expect of a relatively inexpensive model, image tuning does not go particularly deep; there's no sophisticated colour management control to worry about. Instead, Optoma expects HD33 owners to settle for a range of preset display modes: Cinema, Reference, Photo, Bright (for PC use) and User. The model also offers an ISF calibration option, but frankly paying a tune-up guru to work on this kind of model doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

Indeed, I'd argue it's not worth it. The projector's out of the box performance is fine, and the

Reference preset in particular looks great with movies.

None too bright

I know my colleague John Archer was concerned about the brightness levels of this projector's more expensive bigger brother, the HD83 (reviewed in *HCC 203*), and nor is this an overwhelmingly bright PJ. Rated at 1800 ANSI lumens, the Optoma HD33 does its best work in a fully dark room, which preserves its dynamics. Yet, while the HD33 doesn't do truly epic blacks, it does track a greyscale well and is convincing enough when it comes to dark scenes. Noise and fizz are low; consequently night sequences look as smooth as chocolate.

Colour fidelity is also above average, particularly reds which look spectacularly authentic (the Reference preset with the PureColor 1 setting is ace).

Horizontal panning is commendable, too. I noted zero judder from 1080p24 Blu-ray source material. The key to this stutter-free performance is down to Optoma's proprietary frame-interpolation processing, called PureMotion 4. This does what few frame

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
Affordable Full HD3D Full HD home cinema projector

POSITION:
Optoma's entry-level home cinema-specific 3D PJ – sits below the HD83

PEERS:
Epson EH-TW5900; Epson EH-TH6000W

**Get connected:**

The inclusion of a 12V trigger is good news for fans of home automation

interpolation processes have done before, which is to maintain the texture of celluloid while minimizing judder. Motion picture resolution, however, is less than 700 lines. While there are three grades of PureMotion processing available (Low, Middle and High), none actually improve moving picture definition.

Over the rainbow

One traditional failing of single-chip DLP technology is rainbows – that much discussed characteristic of the technology that causes high contrast images to exhibit colour fringing. I've always been very susceptible to it (although I'll concede many aren't), and once spotted find it difficult to avoid.

But clearly great strides have been made to reduce it here.

'The Optoma's high-definition pictures prove sharper than Freddy Krueger's cutlery draw'

While I still clocked the occasional RGB flash during *Lady Gaga: The Monster Ball* (an excellent Blu-ray demo disc), particularly during the more contrasty monochromatic sequences, I never felt the effect was intrusive.

Of course, it's the HD33's 3D performance that will be a big attraction for many, inspiring newcomers to the world of projection for the first time and providing an incentive for the rest of us to upgrade. The good news is that the stereoscopic presentation here is extremely effective. 3D images have a believable sense of depth, and fun 'outy' stuff really can cause you to duck involuntarily.

The HD33's 3D images are also refreshingly clean. There're only low levels of crosstalk evident, and on really well-mastered 3D Blu-rays, it's actually difficult to spot any double imaging at all.

While Optoma's new RF-based Active Shutter glasses are a little bit Michael Caine in terms of design, they are also comfortably bright. There's no real sense of light loss when wearing them, and contrast remains high. You don't have to worry about them running out of juice either, as they are USB rechargeable. One pair is included in the box.

I primarily used the HD33 with frame-sequential 3D Blu-ray as my source, however it's just as happy working with Side-By-Side content, as favoured by Sky and AVCHD 3D camcorders.

There is one caveat worth bearing in mind though: the projector illuminates just beyond the edge of the picture area, presenting everything within a slim grey frame which can't be masked out. Consequently, I'd say this model is best suited for use with a black-edged screen, rather than just projected onto a white wall. A proper black border really helps delineate the image.

Delivers where it counts

While you'll need to pay more for a brighter home cinema projector, my time spent munching popcorn with Optoma's HD33 proved to be something of a revelation; with super-sharp 2D, and entertaining 3D, it delivers where it counts – on the bigscreen. You should be prepared to run it in a properly darkened room for the best effect, but you can't argue with its value. If you want one, get down your dealer quick...●

→Analysis

GUI: Like most projectors, the menu system is resolutely text-based – but it shouldn't pose any problems to those with a little tech knowledge

Power consumption: The Optoma used 251W almost continuously during movie playback

Killer feature: Optoma's decision to use RF rather than IR transmission for its 3D glasses means you're not likely to experience drop outs

→Specifications

3D: YES Active shutter (one set of glasses supplied)

Full HD: YES 1080p24

Connections: 2 x HDMI v1.4; 1 x component; 1 x 15-pin D-Sub PC; 1 x composite video; 1 x 12V trigger; 1 x RS232

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

Brightness (claimed): 1800 ANSI Lumens

Contrast ratio (claimed): 10,000:1

Dimensions (off stand): 379(w) x 112(h) x 313(d)mm

Weight: 4.5kg

Features: Single-chip DLP imaging system; backlit remote control; keystone correction; manual zoom and focus control; projection picture size up to 200 inches from a distance of four metres; 480/60i, 576/50i, 480/60p, 576/50p, 720/60p, 720/50p, 1080/60i, 1080/50i, 1080/24p video formats supported

**HCC VERDICT**

Optoma HD33 → £1,350 Approx

→ Supplier: www.optoma.co.uk

→ Tel: 01923 691 800

Highs: Sharp HD; negligible DLP 'rainbow' colour fringing; keystone correction; effective 3D presentation

Lows: No onboard audio system; a little noisy; not too bright

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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The 64D8000 is gorgeous
to behold – but is your
viewing room big enough?

Samsung's wonderwall

Those looking for a monster flatscreen TV that's more BFI than TOWIE should audition this affordable over-achiever, suggests **Steve May**

For a cinematic, bigscreen viewing experience a giant plasma is hard to beat. The technology has always had its fans, not least because it's simply more cinematic than LED LCD TVs. But if you're on the hunt for a big PDP, one brand that might not spring immediately to mind is Samsung. This isn't exactly surprising. The LCD market leader tends to treat the technology like the proverbial evil twin locked in the attic.

This is undoubtedly a shame. On the evidence of this 64in monster, Samsung's plasma screens deserve much wider appreciation.

Straight from the box, the PS64D8000 dazzles. It's thin and very shiny, much like the brand's designer LED line. Just 37mm thin, the panel balances (not entirely convincingly) on a chrome X-wing pedestal. Clear Image technology all but eliminates the shadow image seen on earlier plasma screens, when viewed from an angle.

Around the back is a cookie-cutter jack pack. There are four HDMI inputs (one with ARC), component and Scart inputs via adaptors, PC D-Sub, Ethernet LAN, two USBs, plus an optical digital audio output. Wi-Fi is integrated and supports WPS push button routers.

In addition to Freeview HD, the set has a DVB-S2 satellite tuner. While not as neat as a curated Freesat environment, hooking it up to a Sky dish will give you a flood of channels. Not that you're restricted to Astra. There's support for a dish positioner too, with precise step-size control and USALS (Universal Satellite Automatic Location System)/DiSEqC 1.2 motor control.

The set's user interface is familiar enough. Samsung screens are easy to navigate and come with a snazzy-looking hi-res program guide. The TV also supports USB recording to an external hard drive. Using a Schedule Manager, you can programme recordings directly from the Guide – helpful if you need to nip out and buy a copy *HCC*. Remember, the set only has one tuner, so you can't record one channel and watch another. This isn't a replacement for a PVR, more an emergency back-up. Recordings made to a hard drive are locked to the TV; you can't view them on another screen.

Black sheep:

It's a shame the remote doesn't mirror the silver aesthetics of the TV

Top of the pops

Image quality is top notch. The D8000's pictures have the kind of peaky pop most commonly associated with LED. But there are additional benefits to be had with just a little fine tuning. Sharpness, in particular, should be pulled right back from the default (go higher than 18 on the scale and objects glow with edge enhancement), contrast similarly needs to be calmed down. Even then, the picture still seems significantly brighter than Panasonic's VT30 models.

Colour fidelity is terrific. Reds have a rosy authenticity that only plasma really seems able to nail. If you seek additional lustre, there's the ability to dig deep and adjust quite precisely RGB gain and darkness levels. Black levels are deep and smooth, with excellent greyscale tracking. You can find blacker blacks elsewhere, but the balance here is perfectly acceptable.

Motion resolution is fine, too. I clocked the screen at high on 1080 >



AV/CV

PRODUCT: 64in plasma with Active Shutter 3D and Smart features

POSITION: The top-ranked plasma in the brand's D8000 range

PEERS: Panasonic TX-P65VT30; Sony KDL-55HX923





Glamour model:

The Samsung offers deep, smooth blacks and good colour tones

lines. Although a 600Hz subfield drive is listed amongst the specs, this is not to be confused with the MotionPlus framerate tech used on the company's LED LCD screens. There are several plus points to not having to rely on accelerated refresh rates. One is that full motion clarity does not come with smudgy motion artefacts. The other is that the set retains a wonderfully filmic quality.

The screen offers a wide selection of interesting and advanced picture adjustments: there's variable Cell Light pixel brightness, Black Tone, Dynamic Contrast, gamma, edge

'Image quality is top notch. The D8000's pictures have the kind of pop commonly associated with LED'

enhancement and Motion Lighting – the latter is actually an Eco mode. Use them carefully. Dynamic Contrast and Black Tone make it easy to overstress blacks, and this doesn't necessarily enhance the image.

Of course, if you don't want to poke around in the settings right off the bat, there're the standard presets: Standard, Dynamic, Movie and Relax. Frankly, I'd liked to have seen a THX movie preset included too, but as it is the Standard setting with certain adjustments does a fine job.

On the debit side, I did note both vertical and horizontal judder. Bizarrely, this was more evident on 1080p24 material. The Cinema Smooth mode, only active with 1080p24 material, did little to solve the sporadic problem.

The set's 3D performance is equally praiseworthy. There's

precious little crosstalk double imaging evident, and this stereoscopic clarity really came into its own playing *Arkham City* on the Xbox 360 in 3D.

Gamers can take comfort from the fact that buried in the menus are a selection of screenburn protection measures. You can choose either a screensaver (which will prove irritating when it pops up during an end-of-level boss) or more subtle pixel shifting.

Naturally, the PS64D8000 has a full complement of 'net connectivity. Samsung's Smart Hub portal continues to set the pace when it comes to downloadable apps. While the appeal of Facebook and Twitter on a TV is limited, Skype video calling is a winner. You just need to add Samsung's USB HD Skype-cam.

Meanwhile, the quality of the various streaming media services (the rosters includes LOVEFILM, Muzu.TV, BBC iPlayer and Blinkbox) can be surprisingly good, with many looking comparable to SD channels from Freeview.

The set also incorporates a fully-functional browser based on the WebKit layout engine. The fact that it supports Flash (but not ActiveX) makes it far more usable than the stripped-down browsers available on rival sets.

Engaging mega-screen

The PS64D8000 is a wonderfully engaging mega-screen, priced extremely competitively. Its 3D performance is bright and convincing, while Full HD 2D is grandly cinematic. Throw in the content-rich Smart Hub portal and designer looks and you'll find this monster panel surprisingly agreeable to live with •

→ Analysis



GUI: Samsung's Smart Home is your jumping off point for Hub than just VOD and apps – picture tweaks, etc. can be accessed from here, too

Power consumption: While a measured average real-world power draw of 145W is fairly high, it's an improvement on PDPs of yesteryear

Killer feature: The PS64D8000's motion clarity ensures detail is never lost when the going gets tough

→ Specifications

3D: YES Active shutter (no glasses supplied, though)

Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080

Tuner: YES Freeview HD; analogue; DVB-S2

Connections: 4 x HDMI; 1 x component (via adaptor); 1 x Scart (via adaptor); 1 x D-Sub PC input; 1 x optical digital audio; 2 x USB;

1 x Ethernet

Sound: 2 x 15W

Dimensions (off stand): 1,488(w) x 889(h) x 37(d)mm

Weight (off stand): 35kg

Features: 600Hz sub-field drive; USB media playback (JPEG, MP3, AVI, MKV, VOB, WMV support); integrated Wi-Fi; Smart Hub featuring BBC iPlayer, YouTube, LOVEFILM, Daily Motion, Vimeo, Facebook, Twitter and more; Acetrax video streaming service



HCC VERDICT

Samsung PS64D8000

£2,400 Approx

Supplier: www.samsung.co.uk

Tel: 0330 7267864

Highs: Crisp, dynamic Full HD images; vibrant 3D; expansive Smart Hub proposition; beautiful to look at; good screen burn provision

Lows: Horizontal and vertical image judder; Social Media apps require separate Samsung account

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Taking it to the Max

Our bass-obsessive **Adam Rayner** tries out a 12in subwoofer with some tasty EQ – and finds it costs less than he'd bargained for

Ugly sister:
Square and black, the EQ-Max12 won't win any design awards



→ Specifications

Drive Unit: 12in reinforced fibre cone with dual-layer copper voice coil
Enclosure: Front-firing driver, twin down-firing ports
Frequency Response: 25Hz-120Hz
On-Board Power: 225W RMS Class D amplifier
Dimensions: 454(h) x 416(w) x 457(d)mm
Weight: 28Kg
Connections: Stereo LFE line in and line out; speaker level inputs and outputs; 3.5mm socket for 12V trigger and EQ microphone

You have to love the phrase 'doing the doof-doofs'. A silly term for describing a clever technical process where a device, either a subwoofer or a system-tuning equaliser, has both voice and ears. The voice makes tone burst sounds that sweep from low to high (and go 'doof-doof') and the ears are the microphone, supplied with the Velodyne EQ-Max12 – part of a new range of mid-priced subs from the LFE brand. The Digital Signal Processor inside is a five-band parametric equaliser – and it strives to set the woofer to best suit not just your room, but exactly where you put and point it.

It's really easy to use. You plug in the mic and put it where you listen. Press the EQ button like you mean it, for three seconds. And that's it – the EQ-Max makes a dozen comedy noises, and then carries on playing bass from your source. The whole charade takes a minute or two at most, but you may find yourself forever fiddling about with your sub and then re-equalising it just for fun.

A supplied remote sets level and phase in four ninety-degree steps, as

well as offering a quartet of presets: Movies, R&B/Rock, Jazz/Classical and Games. You're not told what each preset means, but Movies seems to offer some extra biff in the lower bass zone around thirty cycles, while Jazz/Classical is the flattest. Games, as far as I can tell, is a harder hitting version of Movies, and the R&B/Rock preset has a higher up hump to offer more weight without quite the madness of low extension.

The EQ Max has been made to cost a bit less than some of the brand's other woofers – the box is pretty ugly – but the 12in driver is still a serious offering.

And how does it sound? Gorgeous. It did take some running in, and it didn't prove quite as super-fast and musical as the Canton Chrono CL sub (reviewed on p84), but was way more potent. It hit richer and deeper with more weight in the bottom frequencies.

In fact, the EQ-Max12 has all the Velodyne DNA you could wish for. This means massive output, easy control and setup, and a lovely, opulent massy character to your bass end. I'll take two, thanks ●

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
12in sub driven by a 225W Class D amp

POSITION:
Flanked by 10in and 15in versions in the EQ-Max range

PEERS:
Focal Profile SW 908;
REL R328;
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12

HCC VERDICT

Velodyne EQ-Max12 → £800 Approx
 Supplier: www.red-line.co.uk
 Tel: 01268 858 222

Highs: Easy to set and has some really cool features; the output is rich, deep, taut and potent

Lows: So basic in design you'll want to hide it; lacks musicality

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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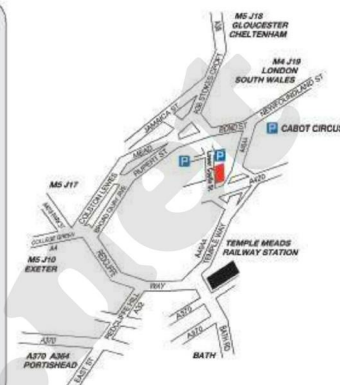
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WHAT HI-FI?
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Best bar none

When it comes to features and convenience, this all-in-one soundbar ticks every box. **Steve May** packs away his rear speakers for the weekend



LG's stylish soundbar/sub combi offers quality performance and oodles of features



The HLX-56S is an all-in-one home cinema system cast in the shape of a soundbar. With integrated Blu-ray player, digital amplifier, net portal and media streamer, it's pretty much all you need for instant AV gratification.

Now I know what you're thinking: a shove-it-all-in soundbar can't possibly deliver a credible home entertainment experience. But if you're tight on space, want something extremely simple to use, or just need to upgrade a flatscreen in a den or bedroom, then it's well worth investigating.

Of course, at £750 it's not exactly a cheap option, but you do get some refinement for your cash. From the chirping touch-sensitive controls ranged across the top, to the smooth slot-loading disc mechanism, it's a nice system to drive.

The 'bar itself is accompanied by a standalone 150W subwoofer. Rather thoughtfully, this is wireless (using the 5.8GHz band) which makes placement/cable management a doddle. The display glows blue in contentment when it auto-connects to the main player. LG rates its wireless range at 20m, but you won't need to test this. It can sound directional, so keep it near to the 'bar for best integration.

The HLX-56S has two HDMI inputs and one out. Other connections includes an optical digital audio input, a terminal for a wired iPod dock, FM aerial and Ethernet LAN. Wi-Fi is built-in.

Once networked, the HLX-56S can see and stream from networked PCs and NAS boxes, as well as access LG's Smart TV portal.

The Blu-ray player secreted within the HLX-56S offers a performance comparable with entry-level, stand-alone BD decks. It's compatible with 3D discs and offers a decent level of picture clarity. Loading speeds aren't great, though.

The HLX-56S lacks LG's MediaLink functionality, but USB and network media streaming is excellent regardless, with MKV, AVI and MOVs all playing nicely. The player is also compatible with AVCHD content, MP3, WMA, WAV and AAC/M4a.

Know your presets

The bar itself offers a variety of acoustic presets. You can choose from Bass Blast (don't!), Natural, Clear Voice, Virtual and Game. However, I preferred to run the system on Bypass.

As with all soundbars, there's some pretence at virtual surround post-processing, but it's more like wide, curvy stereo. I particularly like the mid-range clarity and heft attributed to vocals/centre channel.

Overall, the LG HLX56S is a refreshingly successful example of all-in-one convenience. Blu-ray playback and media streaming is solid, IPTV provision is generous and the audio presentation effective. Check it out if you're after a space-saving entertainment system that doesn't suck.

→ Specifications

3D: YES
Upscaling: YES to 1080p
Multiregion: NO Region B BD/R2 DVD
Connections: 2 x HDMI in; 1 x HDMI out; 1 x optical digital input; 1 x Ethernet; 1 x USB; 1 x composite video
SACD/DVD-A: NO/NO
Profile 2.0: YES
Dimensions: 196(w) x 770(h) x 40(d)mm
Weight: 6.8kg
Features: Network media streaming; integrated Wi-Fi; FM tuner; wired iPod dock; Smart TV portal; power output of 4 x 70W; wireless subwoofer 150W

AV/CV

PRODUCT: 3D-capable, networkable soundbar

POSITION: LG's flagship product in this category

PEERS: Samsung HWD-570 soundbar; Yamaha YHT-SI400 soundbar and separate Blu-ray player package

HCC VERDICT

LG HLX-56S → £750 Approx
 → Supplier: www.lg.com/uk
 → Tel: 0844 847 5454

Highs: Convenient all-in-one design; wireless subwoofer; gutsy audio; plenty of features
Lows: More wide stereo than surround sound; slow-loading BD deck

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Separate but equal

Mark Craven puts the stereo back into his MP3 collection

The idea behind Canton's your_Duo product is simple – the current range of one-box iPod docks just aren't doing justice to our MP3 collections. By 'splitting' the dock into two separate cabinets, you can enjoy real stereo audio.

The two-way your_Duo speakers can be positioned wherever you like in your room – they connect wirelessly to your Mac or PC via the also bundled your_Stick. This hooks into your 'puter via USB. Then it's just a case of finding your music collection and you're in business.

Canton's new range is scaleable, too. The speakers can receive up to three sources, so you could have your_Duos all around your house paired to the same transmitter.

Pros

- Audio quality is impressive. The clarity of the speakers breathes new life into your MP3s and you can get

a genuine stereo spread. There's a good punch to the bottom-end, too.

- The gloss-white finished speakers are nice to look at and seem very well-built, with a good heft to them. Their size (24cm tall) means they're easily slotted on to a bookshelf or desktop.

- Setup is painless and the transmission range of the your_Stick is rated at 20m. I didn't experience any drop-outs (until I took my laptop to the bottom of the garden...)

Cons

- You need the your_Stick (or the forthcoming your_Dock) to stream audio to the speakers – Bluetooth and AirPlay are not offered. This could nark owners of smartphones and tablets.

- The active speakers require power – so you'll need to find two mains plugs and work out how to hide those wires...



Bookshelf beauties:
The your_Duo speakers are well-built

HCC VERDICT

Canton your_Duo/your_Stick
£600 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

GAEMS G155 → £300 Approx

(Pac-) Man in a suitcase

Steve May takes his games console on the road

It's not everyday you see a game system in a suitcase. But that's what we have here. The G155 Gaming and Entertainment Mobile System (hence GAEMS) comprises a low-lag 720p 15.5in screen and console-securing straps, net bumpers and a foam base to hold an entrapped games system (Xbox 360 or PS3 slim).

The idea is to have a completely self-contained unit suitable to take

camping, haul around to a mate's house or ship to a posting in Kandahar. It's a novel enough concept, but just how good is the execution?

Well, the G155 plastic hard case certainly seems durable, but calibration is limited with only the bare minimum of adjustments on offer. The Picture menu has sliders for brightness, contrast and saturation, but there's no sharpness control. This is annoying as the screen clearly adds edge enhancement, evidenced by a white glow around text.

Pros

- The GAEMS G155 system complies with American TSA airline carry-on guidelines, so you should be able to treat it as hand luggage; although, frankly, when loaded up with an Xbox 360, power

brick and sundries, it's pretty darn heavy at around 8kg.

- Hook up is easy. There's a front-facing HDMI input for the transported games system, but no other inputs. Integrated speakers make an undeniably stereophonic noise, but you may well prefer headphones. The unit offers paired 'phone jacks, so two can enjoy the show.

Cons

- There's no internal battery. You'll need a handy power point to get your gaming fix.
- The screen is very directional. View off-angle and colour, detail and contrast fade away.

HCC VERDICT

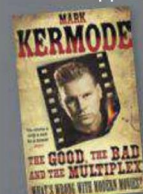
GAEMS G155
£300 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



In Brief

The Good, the Bad and the Multiplex
Mark Kermode
£12 Approx



The UK's 'most trusted film critic' goes on the offensive against modern Hollywood movies and the declining standards of cinemas in this hilarious read. You might not agree with everything Kermode writes, but there's an undeniable passion and wit here

1 2 3 4 5

It's good to be green

The BDP-S185 is a downsized Blu-ray player with a low carbon footprint. Polar bear-loving **Steve May** can see its appeal



Sony's BDP-S185 is an affordable, ridiculously compact Blu-ray player with full 'net functionality. Just 290mm wide, principally because it uses an outboard power brick, it's being promoted both as space-saving and energy efficient. This is home theatre for eco warriors on a budget.

One thing's for certain: the BDP-S185 is cute. Also available in silver, this diminutive deck has a slick brushed-aluminium exterior, gently sloping roof, and stubby little remote control.

Connectivity is predictably basic. Grouped in a huddle are HDMI, phono AV and a coaxial digital outputs, plus Ethernet. A USB is provided under a bung on the front fascia for local media playback. File compatibility from this is extremely good. The player only stumbled a few times with my ill-mannered assortment of rips and downloads, playing MTS, MKV, AVI, WMV and MP4 content. Audio support covers MP3, AAC, WMA and LPCM. Curiously, the deck was unable to navigate specific albums; instead it could only navigate loose music tracks within a designated folder.

While this player's XrossMediaBar GUI is the same as its full-size stablemates, there have been some obvious specification cutbacks. Super Audio CD compatibility is out the window and there's no media streaming across the network.

But I suspect this won't worry too many buyers. The deck still offers unfettered access to the Sony Entertainment Network. Home of numerous streaming and catch-up TV services, from BBC iPlayer and Demand 5, to YouTube (at the time of audition the deck was using a standard-def YouTube client) and Dailymotion, it presents a busy face

Dressed to impress:
Budget this deck may be, but it still looks stylish

to the world. And with Sony's Movies Unlimited VOD service onboard you're certain to save yourself some cash travelling to the local video rental store.

Worth waiting for

Loading speeds are on the slow-side of average. A Java-heavy Blu-ray (*Goldfinger*) took 61 seconds to lumber onscreen. However, image quality is worth the wait, with copious fine detail and effortless colour gradations. The deck has full BD playback functionality, including Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio. Bitstream these into a waiting AVR and the deck sounds just as good as its bigger brothers.

The model isn't 3D compatible, but that's fine given the price. For many, this will be their first taste of Blu-ray – and it doesn't disappoint.

The BDP-S185's green angle is rather compelling. Sony claims it uses 47 per cent less power than regular-width models in the Sony range (I measured a maximum of 10W), and as it's narrower and a good deal lighter, packaging and transport costs are similarly reduced. Sony estimates this to be a saving of 40 per cent in carbon emissions.

Overall, it's difficult to fault the BDP-S185, given the form factor and price. Sony lists the player at £90, but it's available for less if you shop around. This makes it something of a steal, given that it features pretty much all the functionality of the brand's £100 BD-eschewing SMP-N200 media player.

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
Entry-level networked Blu-ray player

POSITION:
The lead-in model to Sony's full-size Blu-ray separates

PEERS:
Asda ONN Blu-ray player; Panasonic DMP-BD75

→ Specifications

3D: NO
Upscaling: YES to 1080p
Multiregion: NO Region B BD/R2 DVD
Connections: 1 x HDMI v1.3; phono stereo audio; 1 x coaxial digital output; 1 x Ethernet; 1 x USB
SACD/DVD-A: NO/NO Even Sony won't offer SACD playback at this price
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD decoding: YES/YES
Dolby True HD/DTS-HD bitstream: YES/YES
Profile 2.0: YES
Dimensions: 290(w) x 188(d) x 42.5(h)mm
Weight: 1.15kg
Features: Media playback via USB; IPTV via the Sony Entertainment Network; 10W power consumption



HCC VERDICT

Sony BDP-S185 → £90 Approx
Supplier: www.sony.co.uk
→ Tel: 08705 111 999

Highs: Convenient form factor; IPTV-rich content portal; good USB playback

Lows: Not the quickest deck on the block; no DLNA functionality; no Super Audio CD support

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Play it your way

Pioneer has developed a revolutionary new speaker system. This system features HVT technology to produce immersing sound in a full and unique 360° soundscape.



HTP-SLH500

The superslim and stylish HTP-SLH500 home theatre package includes the S-HV500 'Sound Wing' satellite speakers, along with the VSX-S300 slim AV receiver and S-SWL500 slim subwoofer.

Pioneer

www.pioneer.co.uk

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Superior smallscreen

Toshiba's 32UL863B offers a solid AV performance and a mass of features – **Mark Craven** wonders whether there's room in his house for another TV



Pixel pusher:
Hi-def Blu-rays
look pin-sharp
even on this
32in TV

Toshiba's flatscreen resurgence continues with this feature-rich 32in LED set. Of course, it lacks the 'wow' factor of the CEVO-powered 55in TV reviewed last issue, but this is a brilliantly executed product that will do a job in any small cinema setup or second room. While it's not the most affordable TV at this size, I reckon the extra outlay is worth it.

Unfussy fascia

Build quality is good and the 32UL863B sports an unfussy, non-descript design. Surprisingly, the remote is the same 'slider' model that comes with Toshiba's high-end sets.

Connectivity is the current standard, and includes four HDMI's (with ARC support) Ethernet – should you not have Wi-Fi – and a pair of USBs. One of the latter can be used to record from the TV's in-built Freeview HD tuner, giving you basic timeshifting functionality. And, naturally, you can use the USB ports to play various media files.

Even without delving into the 32UL863B's extensive picture calibration options (which are possibly overkill on a screen at this

size and price), the TV delivers pleasing images. A Full HD panel has just as clear benefits at 32in as a screen twice as large, and Blu-ray material comes across razor-sharp. Colours are equally impressive, providing you steer clear of the Dynamic preset which leaves bright tones little room for subtlety.

Footage from the standard-def tuner is predictably softer, but Toshiba's Resolution+ processing can sharpen it up a touch.

Tortuous test patterns showed the brand's edge-LED system resulting in a slight greying out in the bottom corners of the panel, but this – and juddering with horizontal and vertical pans – prove less intrusive when viewing regular movie footage. I could easily watch films on this flatscreen all day long – as long as the TV was partnered with a separate sound system, as its audio is feeble to say the least.

Another standout feature of the 32UL863 is its well-developed user interface. Whether you're browsing the Places Smart TV portal or tweaking the picture settings, you're accompanied by gorgeous hi-res icons and sensible navigation. Other brands should take note.

→ Specifications

3D: No Not on the UL range

Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080

Tuner: YES Freeview HD; DVB-S2

Connections: 4 x HDMI;

1 x component; 1 x D-Sub PC input;

1 x Scart; 1 x composite; 2 x USB 2.0;

1 x Ethernet

Sound: 2 x 10W

Dimensions (off stand): 752(w) x

473(h) x 36(d)mm

Weight (off stand): 8.9kg

Features: Place Smart TV portal; built-in Wi-Fi; Personal TV with face recognition; DLNA streaming; 100Hz processing; Resolution+; greyscale, gamma and colour management; built-in test pattern; USB media playback; recording to USB from Freeview tuner

HCC VERDICT

Toshiba 32UL863B → £400 Approx

→ Supplier: www.toshiba.co.uk

→ Tel: 0844 856 0730

Highs: HD picture performance; integrated Wi-Fi; slick user interface; calibration options

Lows: Weak audio; slight light pooling in dark scenes

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

AV/CV

PRODUCT:

32in LED TV with Freeview HD and Smart functions

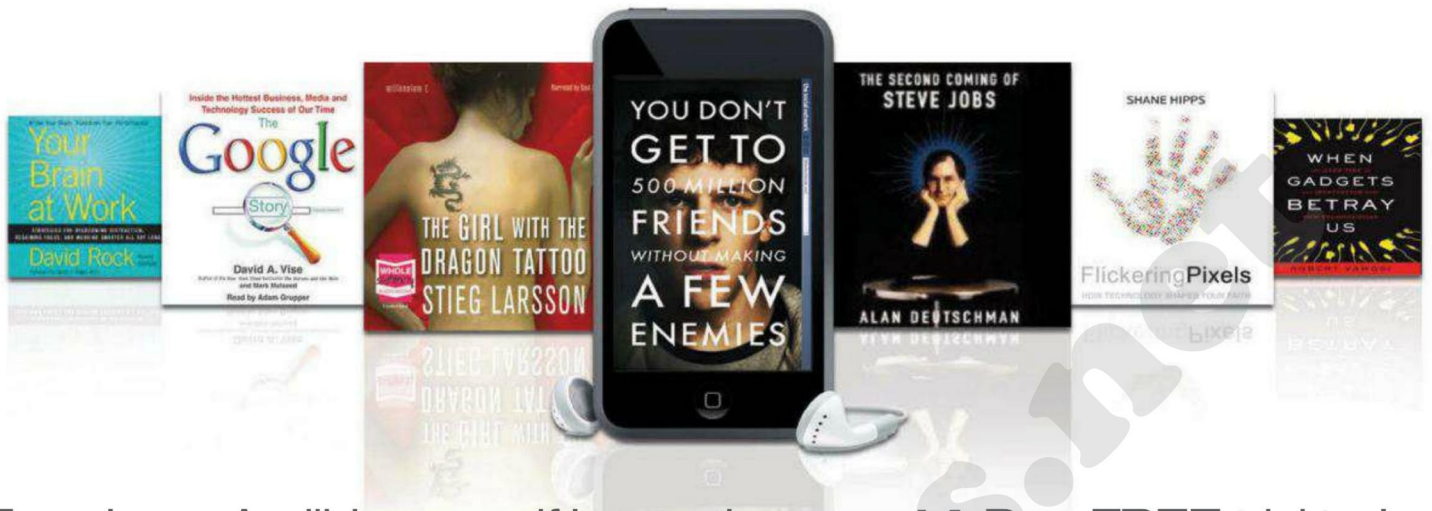
POSITION:

In the middle of Toshiba's current lineup

PEERS:

Sony KDL-32CX523;
Samsung UE32D5000

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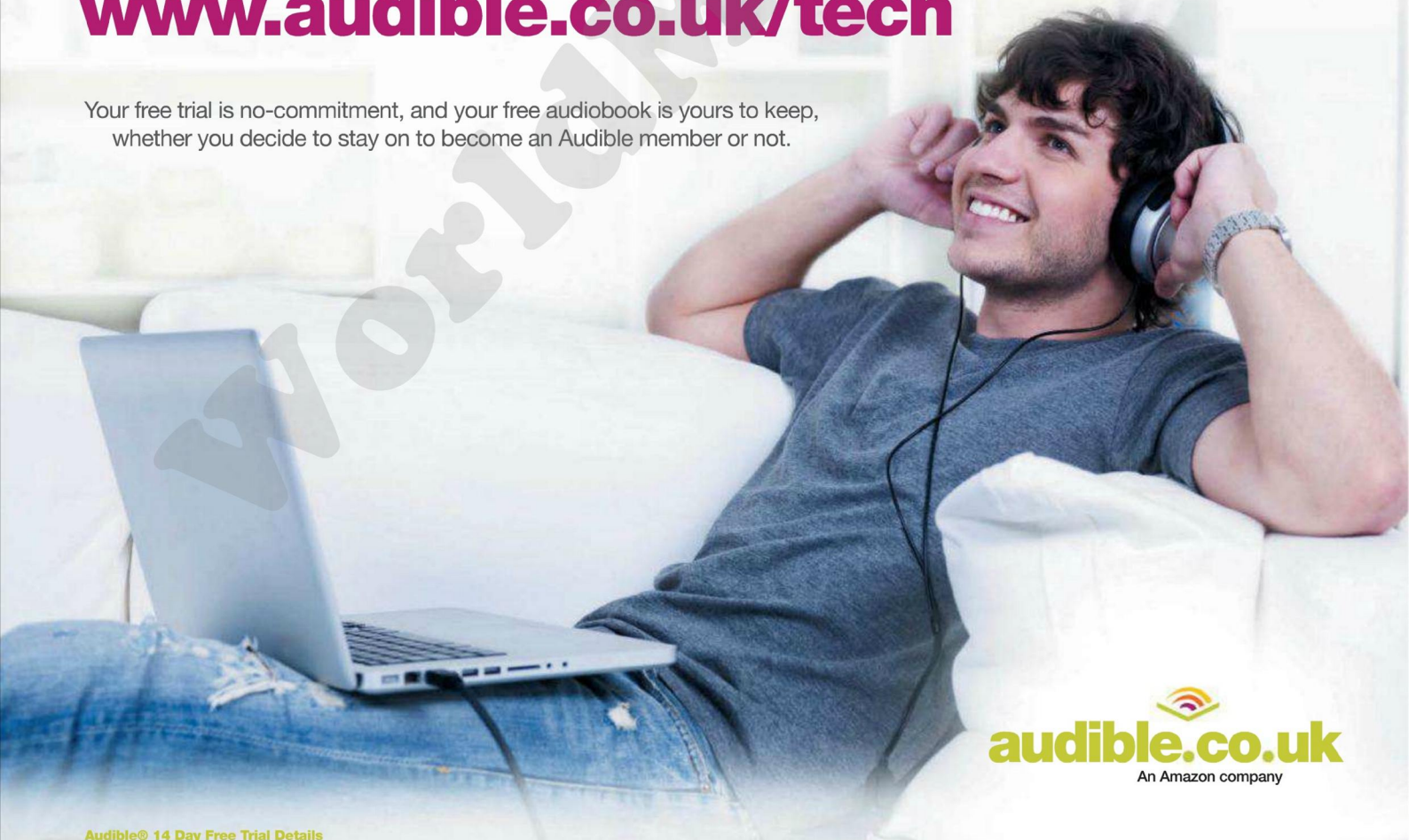


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Cloud control

Thanks to Vivadi you don't need to pay the Earth for a high-end server system. But **Steve May** wonders if you want your media stored that way

As stormy iClouds gather over the home entertainment business, threatening to replace physical media with content streamed from a virtual locker, there's something almost quaint about the idea of a media server system – a physical repository for your movies and music that sits on a home network. But are media servers really an AV cul-de-sac that time is rapidly forgetting, or the most practical multimedia solution of all, combining the benefits of tangible discs with the convenience of Video On Demand? The answer probably lies somewhere in-between.

State of the art

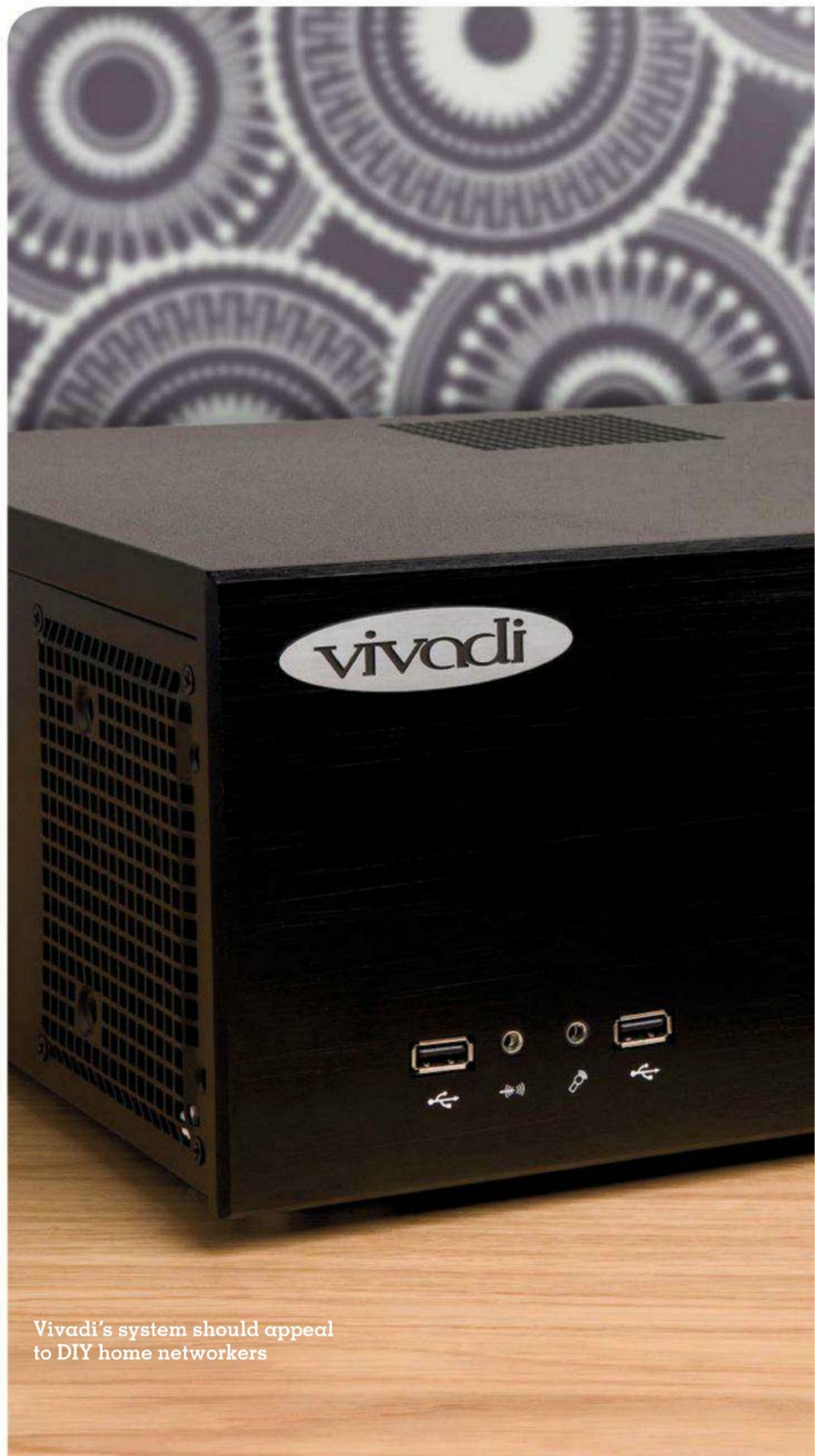
There are a number of media server suppliers competing in the custom install space, and the general aim of all is to ape the functionality of the renowned, high-end Kaleidescape system, without the typically wince-inducing cost. This is most commonly achieved with Windows Media Centre (WMC) and plug-ins such as My Movies. And that's pretty much what we have here from Vivadi – albeit freshened with some bespoke coding and neatly integrated

client devices designed to make multi-room networked entertainment a breeze.

Of course, PC hobbyists have been building their own media centres for years using both Windows and Linux operating systems and miscellaneous software. And don't they go about it...

But that's not who this system is aimed at. Vivadi is selling to those without the skills or time to faff around with a DIY build, as well as custom installers who want bespoke

Double vision:
Both the client and server come with their own handset



Vivadi's system should appeal to DIY home networkers

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
Windows 7
media server
with integrated
Blu-ray/CD
ripper

POSITION:
At the upper
end of a
bespoke range

PEERS:
Living Control
Studio 3

interoperability between the kit and pro-control systems.

To that end, the company offers a family of related server products. Single room systems start at £500 and you can expand as need be.

Living the high life

The package I auditioned is the company's 'Luxury' multi-room system, priced at around £4,000. It comprises the sizable MMS416 MediaMaster server and three streaming clients,

which brings sound and vision to four rooms.

Beneath the lid, the MMS416 employs two Western Digital 3TB Caviar Green drives (enough for a squillion DVDs and not quite so many Blu-rays). It's powered by a dual core AMD Athlon II X2 265 processor, with 4GB of Corsair RAM, and uses the NVIDIA GeForce GT430 3D graphics solution.

Build quality of the MMS416 itself is high. Vivadi has chosen a well-made case which goes some way

to reducing the operational noise of the PC within. Also helping is an Antec EarthWatts power supply, independently certified 80PLUS Bronze efficient.

During general use, the server is not particularly intrusive. Fan noise may be higher than a standard PVR but it's lower than the average desktop PC.

Unfortunately, the MMS416 looks like exactly what it is: a PC in your living room. The brush-effect finish is pleasant enough, but this is still an unglamorous beast. If you're the kind of person whose chunky floorstanders are under constant threat from an un-appreciative partner, then you probably won't get away with bringing this into your lounge, either.

As only the MediaMaster server part of this package is 3D compliant, this needs to be parked in the vicinity of any 3D display. The clients, however, just require the umbilical chord of Ethernet and a screen. The client configuration in this package comprises one Vivadi Dune B1 with local Blu-ray playback (pictured) and twin Dune H1 Media Streamers.

Let the ripping begin

The general idea of a PC-based media server like this is that you don't use it as a PC at all, instead operating it only via the Windows Media Centre user interface. To that end Vivadi ships its packages with an RF-based Windows media remote zapper and RF keyboard.

However, there are times when opening up the PC worm-can isn't such a bad idea. It's only via this route that you can really have fun tagging and organizing the metadata of your movie rips, courtesy of the My Movies management software.

The standard Windows Media Centre interface will be familiar to most PC users, but the My Movies plug-in really takes the user experience to a higher level. You can browse your collection by cover art, and any selected films are supported with hi-res JPEGs, synopsis and cast information.

Ripping will typically be done within the WMC environment. The system automatically finds sleeve art and movie metadata, but it can be caught out – particularly if your collection of discs includes more esoteric fare. It's at times like these you'll need to manually fill in the details for the disc or enter a barcode number >





Connection-heavy: A peek at the rear of the MMS416 makes it clear this is more PC than BD deck

to help it on its way. Personally, I think the end result is worth this extra effort.

The issue of DVD and Blu-ray ripping has always been a contentious one in the world of media servers. Consequently, Vivadi sells the systems without native movie ripping, but all that's needed is an additional £60 software package which can be installed upon delivery.

Media mogul

While Blu-ray discs can be played back live, Vivadi's rig isn't really intended to be used that way. The idea is to pop your disc into the server, let it rip, and play direct from the hard drive; the name of the game is long-term convenience. Making a disc image of a hi-def

gun-metal grey finishes, but they stream silently and efficiently.

The two H1 models in our review system are supplied without local hard drives, while the B1 model has a BD player built-in. Where Vivadi has been clever is in integrating the client interface, so the system feels homogenous.

The units sport HDMI, component and phono AV outputs, with digital optical audio, and can be used to feed pretty much any secondary system or display.

That said, if you already have off-the-shelf DLNA/uPnP media streamers available, they'll probably do the job as well.

Speed search

Media servers are not intended to compete against high-performance hardware; the joy of using one comes through browsing a large collection with a speed and depth that's just not possible if you exclusively use physical media or have a music and video collection that's little more than an unorganized swagbag of MKVs and AVI containers.

And in this sense the Vivadi proposal works well. Having disc ISOs is always preferable to having lower resolution files on tap and the My Movies interface is a popular standard. Consequently, the general usability of this system is high.

For owners of large collections of DVDs and CD, I suspect this Vivadi system will prove hugely seductive, as it combines the convenience of video-on-demand with the benefits of local storage. It's versatile, well appointed and reasonably priced.

'Vivadi's aim is to ape the functionality of a high-end Kaleidescape setup – not the wince-inducing cost'

movie typically takes around 90 minutes or so, depending on the amount of data on the disc. So if you have a very large collection, be prepared to spend a few afternoons building your library.

Of course, the viewing experience from a Blu-ray ISO is the same as from physical media, with multichannel sound streaming out via HDMI. CDs are ripped as Windows Media Audio or WMA Lossless by default.

The Dune-made clients may again be rather unglamorous, with shoebox-like dimensions and

→ Analysis



GUI: The My Movies interface, which contains film synopsis info and hi-res cover art, is bright, colourful and fun to browse

Killer feature: The My Movies plug-in lets you add your own metadata to your titles – perfect if you have some obscure titles in your collection

→ Specifications

MMS416 MediaMaster

HDD: YES 6TB storage capacity
O/S and Interface: Windows 7 Media Centre running My Movies 4 and ArcSoft TotalMedia Theatre 5; NVIDIA 3D graphics solution

Connections: HDMI v1.3 via NVIDIA; optical digital output; eSATA port; Gigabit Ethernet; RS232 Serial port
Features: 3D compatible; USB media playback; Full Windows 7 functionality

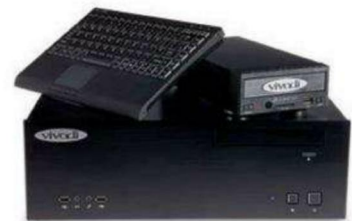
Dimensions: 150(h) x 435(w) x 315(d)mm

Vivadi Dune H1/B1 streamers

HDD: NO Not supplied

Connections: Ethernet; 2 x USB; phono AV out; component out; HDMI v1.2 out; optical digital audio; eSATA

Dimensions: 65(h) x 142(w) x 276(d)mm



HCC VERDICT

Vivadi multiroom server system
£4,000 Approx
Supplier: www.karma-av.co.uk
Tel: 01423 358846

Highs: Generous storage capacity; familiar Windows Media Centre OS with My Movies; pre-configured streaming Dune clients; upgradable
Lows: It's a PC in your living room; fan noise may be intrusive; can seem slow to react to remote commands

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Richard Stevenson MRX 700 Review HCC #195

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Peter Tysons **Carlisle**
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Roy Jowett AV **Colne**
Audio Projects **Leeds**

Scotland

The Home Cinema Centre **Edinburgh**
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Holburn HiFi **Aberdeen**



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Vento ranges in
Canton's lineup

PEERS:

Bowers &
Wilkins CM8;
Dali Ikon 6;
ATC Concept 3

The mix of real wood veneers
and aluminium drivers gives
Canton's Chrono CL range
a classy look



Mid-range magnificence

How good does a £3,600 system need to be to offer 'value for money'? **Adam Rayner** finds out

Never ever underestimate the ignorance of an AV journalist. We all like to think that we know our stuff, but, truthfully, we're all running to keep up with the new, all the time. You see, my knowledge of the German speaker market, and how big any one player was within it, has always been pretty minimal. While I knew about the Canton speaker brand, I still find a sardonic chuckle in the fact that it was another German company's PR firm over here who told me about the sheer size of Canton.

In the largest loudspeaker market in Europe, Canton has a whacking 40 per cent share, with the next two on 8 per cent each arguing as to which is the second biggest! So Canton must know what is doing.

Counting the cost

The Chrono CL system reviewed here is described as representing great value for money, yet still costs thirty-six hundred quid from UK distributor Computers Unlimited. I had a pair of their second biggest Chrono CL towers, called the 580.2 DC, the CL555.2 centre, a pair of the CL 520.2 bookshelf designs for rear use and the Sub 85 for bass.

I also had the white paper about the Chrono CL series – a full technical brochure wherein Canton describes the technologies, the reasons for the clever stuff it does and what the results are. It makes for great bedtime reading, and there is clear evidence of some of the brand's very best ideas and wheezes filtering down from the lofty Reference series down to the mid-range Chrono CLs.

In brief, techno-wise, we have a highly evolved metal dome tweeter all round called ADT-25, with a silken >





Back story: Subwoofer controls include a fully sweepable phase control and crossover

fabric surround, in a neat shallow-dished housing. The main drivers are all Aluminium cones on super-extensible sinusoidal surrounds and the towers have down-firing ports loaded against their own plinths.

Meanwhile, the subwoofer, a 250W job with an 8.5in driver in its front, has another un-driven diaphragm underneath, to act as a passive radiator for the main drivers' bass notes' support.

The system looks lush in the Cherry finish and the grilles (even that of the subwoofer) are magnetically fixed using small Neodymium magnets instead of unsightly holes and posts. I for one cannot wait for the death of the

'Yet another slice of audio excellence from Canton, with a seamless energy and a clean, clear output'

pug-ugly 'Eelon' product that everybody used to have to employ to fix their grilles.

How low can you go?

I used some bass-heavy multichannel music to help set up the subwoofer (which has a fully sweepable phase control, rather than a simple flip switch – far superior for room/location tuning) and was impressed immediately. The subwoofer has great musicality – as well as the ability to drop deep because of the huge suspensions

and passive radiator. Also, the technology Canton calls Displacement Control is used in the towers to enable their relatively small drivers to deliver more low-end than they ought to.

It's not just about the lows, of course. I could hear a reverb on the main vocal coming in great breathy detail from the rears that I hadn't noticed before. And the great high-frequency resolution all round gave a lovely edge to a drum stick tapping on the rim of a snare drum, or tinkling bells.

I then sat down to enjoy a new film in my collection, the cerebral sci-fi actioner *Limitless*. This flick benefits from the large investment put into its soundtrack, which use clever SFX to convey the two main states of its protagonist Eddie – basically, on drugs or off 'em.

The opening, which starts with Eddie on a balcony edge wondering whether to jump while baddies pound their way through his flat's front door. The impact and metallic clang of their bangs was frightening – for a small system in terms of face-space, the Chrono CL array offers a tremendous scale and sheer size of sound as well as an improbable amount of detail.

There are some who may find the sound a little cold rather than warm, with slightly antiseptic clarity and analytical projection. The imaging, while good, was still seemingly anchored to the boxes in my room.

The woofer lapped up *Limitless'* plentiful subsonics, and is an amazing performer for 'just' 250W. It can be made to unload and flap if you send it too low, though, so it'd be really cool to see one of these in a bigger size – a 12in, please! – as well.

On the other hand, you could step up to the bigger towers (the 590.D2s), have them all round the soundstage, and your world would be very potent indeed.

Seamless energy

Like the Vento system reviewed last year, this is yet another slice of audio excellence from Canton. The speakers have a seamless synergy with each other and a clean and clear output. I could hear every other table in diner scenes, and pick out every last piece of falling glass amongst the little car prangs that happen behind a pedestrian chase scene.

High performance, high fidelity and good-looking to boot. Maybe these are value for money after all...

→ Specifications

Canton Chrono CL 580.2 DC towers

Drive Units: 2 x 6in Aluminium cone bass drivers; 1 x 6in Aluminium cone midrange and 1 x 1in Aluminium/Manganese dome tweeter with silk fabric surround

Enclosure: Three-way, down-firing, plinth-loaded port

Frequency Response: 66Hz-24.4kHz

Sensitivity: 87.5dB

Power Handling: 200W

Dimensions: 170(w) x 990(h) x 290(d)mm **Weight:** 17Kg

Canton Chrono CL 555.2 centre channel

Drive Units: 2 x 6in Aluminium cone bass drivers (both get bass, only one gets mids as well); 1 x 1in Aluminium/Manganese dome tweeter with silk fabric surround

Enclosure: Two and a half-way, dual rear-ported

Frequency Response: 74Hz-24.4kHz

Sensitivity: 87.5dB

Power Handling: 140W

Dimensions: 455(w) x 170(h) x 310(d)mm **Weight:** 10.2Kg

Canton Chrono CL 520.2 rears

Drive Units: 1 x 6in Aluminium cone midrange and 1 x 1in Aluminium/Manganese dome tweeter with silk fabric surround

Enclosure: Two-way, rear-ported

Frequency Response: 68Hz-4.4kHz

Sensitivity: 85.5dB

Power Handling: 100W

Dimensions: 170(w) x 295(h) x 293(d)mm **Weight:** 5.7Kg

Canton Chrono Sub 85 subwoofer

Drive Unit: 1 x 8.5in Aluminium cone bass driver; 1 x 8.5in diaphragm as a passive radiator

Enclosure: Passive radiating

Frequency Response: 27Hz-155Hz

On board power: 250W

Dimensions: 275(w) x 385(h) x 400(d)mm **Weight:** 12Kg

Connections: Phono line-level input/output; speaker-level input



HCC VERDICT

Canton Chrono CL Series
£3,600 Approx
Supplier: www.unlimited.com
Tel: 0208 200 8282

Highs: Incredible detail from the high-tech tweeters; rich bass end with melodic grip; classic looks

Lows: The character of the sound may be a bit high-frequency heavy for some

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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Key Features

- **The newest Sigma Designs 8642 media processor:** enjoy excellent playback and performance of interactive features.
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- **MKV player:** play HD and SD video in a popular MKV format and other modern video file formats, including top quality HD video with very high bitrate.
- **RealD:** watch 3D video in this ultra modern format used in cinema for the latest movies.
- **HD audio:** enjoy top-quality audio tracks (Dolby True HD, DTS HD Master Audio, LPCM, FLAC).
- **3 USB ports:** conveniently connect HDDs, USB flash drives, USB card readers and other USB storage devices.
- **HDD rack with hot swap function:** easily and quickly insert and exchange internal 3.5" SATA HDD.
- **SD card slot:** easily play media files on SD memory cards from your camera or other devices, or use an SD memory card as a local or system storage (required for BD Live function).
- **HDMI 1.3:** ensure the best possible quality of HD video and HD audio.
- **A rich set of standard A/V connectors:** use S/PDIF optical audio, stereo audio, component video, composite video outputs to easily connect any A/V equipment.
- **Extended support for Dolby True HD and DTS HD Master Audio:** output bitstream (up to 7.1 channels) or decode to LPCM (up to 7.1 channels) for maximum flexibility when connecting audio equipment, and for extended support of advanced playback features (such as Picture-in-Picture).
- **Video output flexibility:** output video in any resolution and format (from SD to 1080p, 24p/PAL/NTSC).
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Blu-ray at its most basic

Toshiba's latest bare-bones disc-player gets the **Danny Phillips** treatment

Toshiba's BDX1250 is designed to appeal to those making their first timid steps from standard-def DVD to hi-def Blu-ray. No shame in that, except it has to compete with plenty of other decks (including Sony's BDP-S185 and Panasonic's DMP-BD75) that are all taking the same approach. And at this end of the market, price is everything – the launch ticket of £130 made it an immediate non-contender, but shop around and you'll find it for £100 or less.

Pros

- Picture quality from this slimline, compact player is good. Detail-packed scenes are delivered with startling clarity, while colours are kept natural and punchy. Even the tricky trial on the Silicon Optix HQV disc don't cause it many problems, with smooth pans and a pleasing lack of jaggies on the



diagonal filter test. Meanwhile, those who want to fine-tune their pictures can. A sub-menu offers brightness, contrast, hue, saturation and sharpness tweaks.

- A front-mounted USB port caters for media playback of a variety of file formats, including MP3, JPEG, MKV, AVCHD, AAC and WAV. DivX HD files won't play, though.
- Disc-loading times are nice and zippy, with the notoriously tardy *Terminator Salvation* getting to screen in 43 seconds.

Cons

- The BDX1250 makes no provision for Wi-Fi – hardwired Ethernet is all you get. And this is only for

Slim Jim:
The BDX1250 stands just 38mm high

BD-Live purposes. YouTube, BBC iPlayer, Picasa and DLNA media streaming may be present on Toshiba's step-up BDX2250, but they're absent here.

- The supplied remote control is as basic as they come, and sports fiddly little buttons.
- Other rival entry-level decks – particularly Sony's BDP-S185, reviewed on page 76 – offer more features and smarter designs.

HCC VERDICT

Toshiba BDX1250
£100 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Advancing analogue audio

Danny Phillips adds some weight to his TV's speakers

While the major CE brands are busy cramming everything but the kitchen sink into their soundbar offerings, the audio specialists continue to stick to the product's *raison d'être* – replacing the raspy, weedy sonics of your flatpanel's in-built speakers with some high-quality stereo goodness.

This is definitely what Roth Audio's Bar 1 is about – a stylish, slender soundbar and subwoofer combination that will make a real difference to a basic living room setup.



Pros

- The soundbar's built-in drivers (of which there are eight 1.5in midrangers and a pair of 0.75in tweeters, driven by 2 x 16W amplifiers) help craft a decent stereo soundstage, with crisp dialogue and sweet high-frequency effects.
- The 6.5in subwoofer, which connects to the 'bar' wirelessly, adds suitable weight to proceedings. Its tall and slender design makes it easy to tuck away, too.
- Roth Audio's Fractal Expression (FX) post-processing can be called upon to artificially widen the soundstage and boost the phantom centre channel. There's no virtual

surround effect on offer, though.

- Because the 'bar' is just 57mm deep, it can be wall-mounted without upsetting your décor.

Cons

- Connectivity is limited to just stereo audio and a 3.5mm jack. This means the Roth will only be able to work its magic with your TV's audio or two-channel from a source.
- Raising the volume level too high brings in some unwanted noise pollution – sudden loud effects from bombastic action movies can sound distorted, and you'll soon be reaching for the simplistic remote control to calm things down.

HCC VERDICT

Roth Audio Bar 1
£250 Approx

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

In Brief

Moshcam
video-on-demand
Sony Smart TV
£Free



Here's a brilliant VOD service you might not have noticed lurking on your Sony net-connected kit. Moshcam features complete live concerts (all filmed in Australia) for your streaming pleasure. AV quality isn't great, but the range of acts on offer is fantastic – especially if you're into rock!

1 2 3 4 5

HDBaseT technology

The Aavara PE3D4K100A is another fantastic tool for HDMI over distance. Using just a single wire it can be easily retrofitted within an existing network. HDBaseT technology allows this system to send HDMI further and at higher quality than all other conventional HDMI over CAT5 solutions. With no compression and no loss of quality you can get crystal clear 3D 1080P with 7.1 channel audio, and also have IR control, RS232 and extend your 100Mbps LAN all over the one cable!

Over one single run of CAT5 cable you can:

- send uncompressed full HD 3D HDMI with 7.1ch audio
- remotely power the receiver
- IR control the source from the receiver
- RS232 control the source from the receiver
- use the 3 port hub in the sender and receiver to extend your LAN

Code PE3D4K100A

£561.23



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HDMI Audio Inserter Embedder

The AU-11CA Audio Embedder lets you insert an external audio signal into any HDMI source. The device allows you to insert analogue or digital stereo and multi-channel digital surround sound signals (via Optical) to give users the capability to overcome audio issues within complex HDMI installation. The AU-11CA also repeats the HDMI signal to allow an extended total HDMI cable range.

Code AU11CA **£116.49**

GIGAVIDEO 820 Wireless HDMI Sender

At last, a cable free solution for HDMI. Any of the two HDMI inputs can be sent wirelessly up to 30m to the receiver. The signal is sent uncompressed and remains up to and including 1080p. IR feedback gives you source control from the viewing area.

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- Sends the HD signal uncompressed

Code GV820 **£299.00**



Component to HDMI Converter

Component Video to HDMI Converter

Takes in component video and stereo audio and gives you out HDMI up to 1080P. It's simple, small, neat, and it works really well.

Supported Component input resolutions: 480i/P, 576i/P, 720P, 1080i/P

Video input: 3 x RCA phono

Audio input: 2 x RCA phono

Video Output: HDMI socket

Dimensions (WxHxD): 84 x 28 x 76mm



Code CHUCH **£54.99**

SCART to HDMI Upscaler

Converts analogue Scart or s-video into digital HDMI at a choice of resolutions up to 1080P. Great for connecting legacy equipment to an HDMI switchbox for simplifying your connections. Control is by front panel or supplied IR remote

Input signals:

- Scart (RGB or composite)
- s-video
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Outputs:

- HDMI output 720p, 1080p, 1680x1050, 1360x768 and a choice of screen modes (16:9, 16:10, expand & subtitle).

Code HDUSPRO **£79.99**



Felston Digital Audio Delay

If you own an A/V amplifier the DD740 is the definitive answer to lip sync error for up to four sources

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Code DD740 **£199.00**

Keene IR Distribution Amplifier

- Discrete Fascia mount receiver routes IR signals to internal wands
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Code IRBKITF **£49.00**

Aavara HDMI cables

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Code HDAV3

3m version

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Finishing touches

Adrian Justins trawls the shelves for those must-have home cinema extras

NORSTONE ESSE

£160 Approx

Here's an unusual design for an AV stand. Adopting fundamental principles of weight distribution and core strength from using robust materials in an S shaped profile, the Esse is suitable for screens up to 50in, and the top shelf supports up to 80kg, strong enough for any current flatscreen and a couple of speakers. It's available in seven finishes: a black frame with a choice of opaque black, purple, pink, frosted or red glass, or a white frame with frosted or contrasting black glass.

www.norstone-design.com

HCC VERDICT

Nice to see something a little different



ACME DIGITAL MEDIA CENTRE DP-02

£200 Approx



There are myriad ways to extend the reach of your television's entertainment boundaries beyond those of the living room. This multimedia wi-fi player from ACME can send live internet, movies, photos and music to your screen using its HDMI output. For (more or less) instant viewing it boasts a BitTorrent client for

downloading 1080p movies, alternatively it can be hooked up to a portable hard disk (via USB) or SD card.

ACME claims compatibility with most common video formats, including AVI, MOV, MKV, MPEG and WMV. Audio decoding comprises DTS, Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital Plus, and Dolby Digital TrueHD. Other connections include component, optical and coaxial.

www.amazon.co.uk

HCC VERDICT

A bit of DLNA goodness would not go amiss

HOME CINEMA MODULES REMBRANDT CHAIR

From £2,000 Approx

When it comes to seating, a lot of home cinema installs opt for super-comfy recliners that wouldn't look out of place in a Manhattan lounge bar – the Rembrandt chair instead aims to bring a real cinema look to proceedings. It's a traditionally-styled seat with a wood finish and classic red upholstery, and is available in two- or three-seat configurations.

The automatically folding seat provides plenty of room to easily walk between rows and the special base can serve as a vent for the distribution of air-conditioning and/or heating.

www.homecinemamodules.com

HCC VERDICT

Makes us want to fire up the popcorn machine



BOSE OE2/OE2I HEADPHONES

£130/£160 Approx

Every 15 minutes a set of headphones is bought in the UK, so no wonder we're spoilt for choice when it comes to buying new cans. Bose, however, claims three decades of continuous on-head audio research has given it a distinct performance advantage. This new range features an enhanced proprietary acoustic structure, dubbed TriPort; redesigned ear cup ports for a more balanced, natural sound; and a slimmer profile than previous models. And, crucially, there is no manufactured 'boost' across the frequency range.

The pricier 'i' version features an in-line remote and microphone for use with iPhones, etc. Both sets offer ear cushions made from memory foam and collapse neatly for carrying in their included case.

www.bose.com

HCC VERDICT

A bit of luxury for your lug holes



VOOMOTE ZAPPER

£50 Approx

Few iPod/iPad/iPhone dongles look as elegant as this intriguing device, which we first spotted at the IFA show in September and has finally reached the UK. The VooMote Zapper converts your iDevice into a universal remote handset, when used in conjunction with an iTunes app that can be customised to suit your own preferences. It also includes a TV guide and social media interaction so you can tweet every time you change channels – should you want to... The Zapper comes in 11 cover colours and matching cases.

www.voomote.tv

HCC VERDICT

Have remote controls just became cool?

Clips...

Small items that could make a big difference to your system

Audioquest Cinnamon HDMI

£26 Approx



Does it help that an AV cable is attractively designed? Not in the bigger

scheme of things, but solid manufacturing and attention to detail are good indicators of a high level of performance. Naturally, this 1m cable takes 3D capability, ARC and Ethernet compatibility in its stride.

www.audioquest.com

Plextor PX-128M2P

£200 Approx



Some day all computer disks will be solid state rather than hard disk.

At least that what Plextor reckons, and this 2.5in model features bespoke firmware to help deliver stability and consistency, avoiding any loss in performance over time. It also has claimed sequential read and write speeds of up to 500MB/s.

Atlas Cable Equator Mk III

£75/m pair Approx



Soldering is bad news for interconnects, as it's a possible source of

deterioration. Atlas's latest Integra phono plug features an airtight 'cold-weld' (or crimped) join between the copper cable conductor and plug, which it says improves the interface, maintaining signal purity.

iCade Retro Gaming Arcade for iPad

£80 Approx



This quirky iPad/iPad2 dock lets you play classic games, downloadable

from the Apple App store, on old-school style controllers. Will keep you entertained while the young 'uns are watching Shrek on the home cinema.

www.firebox.com

THE TOP 20

Choosing a home cinema system is a potential minefield that must be negotiated with great care or safely avoided by letting experts guide you. If you want to end up with a system that, as a minimum, meets your expectations in terms of picture and sound quality, reading magazine product reviews and choosing the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys can only ever be part of the answer at best. Looking for the cheapest price and having a system delivered to your door, even with a 'knowledgeable' friend to help set it up, is a well-trodden path to disappointment.

There is a bewildering choice of components on the market today and also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, or plasma, LCD or LED TV? 3D or non-3D? Full 1080p capability is now the only sensible choice but the appropriate source components, such as a Blu-ray player, need to be part of the equation. The sound performance of a system is also hugely important, even more so if you will be listening to music, or music DVD's, through the same system. If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Having an amp with the right inputs for the best connectivity is essential but you will also need to decide on a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub and, crucially, where they will be sited for the best results. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

ACHIEVING POTENTIAL

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level. To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity. Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

WHAT AND WHERE TO BUY

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ...**don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

“...Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience.”



So good you'll believe you're there!

GUIDE

TO BUYING HOME A CINEMA SYSTEM



BUYING OR BEING SOLD TO?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a carefully selected group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a far better way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

LISTED BELOW ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY

They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

SOUTH

Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245
www.rayleighhifi.com

Colchester NEW TECHNOLOGY UNLIMITED

33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682
www.newtechnologyunlimited.com

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY

9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE

36 Queen Street. 01628 633995
www.audiovenue.com

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

44a High Street. 01268 779762
Custom Install Dept.
01268 776932
www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

132/4 London Road. 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA

69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007
www.kenthomecinema.co.uk

LONDON

Ealing AUDIO VENUE

27 Bond Street. 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI

190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2040
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

SW20 O'BRIEN HI-FI

60 Durham Road.
020 8946 1528
www.obrienhifi.com

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE

163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200
www.frankharvey.co.uk

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION

48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.com

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS

93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254
www.musicmatters.co.uk

NORTH

Chester ACOUSTICA

17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227
www.acoustica.co.uk

York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate. 01904 627108
www.soundorg.co.uk



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



AVaficionado

For those in the know...

High definition universal Blu-ray Disc™ players offering pristine quality video and audio for home entertainment

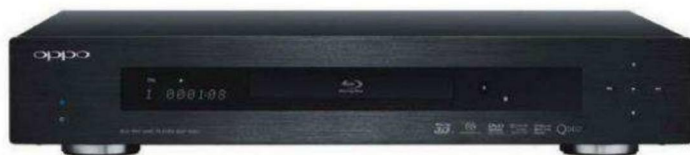
Modified Oppo BDP-93EU and BDP-95EU units are available from AV Aficionado in multi-region (DVD) and multi-zone/multi-region (Blu-ray/DVD) options. All products are supplied with a two-year warranty.

Features include:

- Blu-ray 3D
- SACD and DVD-Audio
- Dual HDMI outputs
- eSATA and dual USB 2.0 ports with NTFS support
- Network streaming and Wireless-N

Designed for the Audiophile, the Oppo BDP-95EU also features:

- Dual ES9018 SABRE 32-bit reference DAC (7.1 and dedicated stereo)
- Balanced stereo XLR
- Toroidal transformer



For further details and prices contact AV Aficionado:
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or buy online at:
www.avaficionado.co.uk

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PLAYBACK

→ **Software highlights** **RISE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES** Bringing a dash of monkey magic to Blu-ray **HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS: PART 2** The boy-wizard waves his wand for the final time **CLEOPATRA** The Hollywood epic hits hi-def **TROLL HUNTER** Norwegian monster mash **BOARDWALK EMPIRE** Martin Scorsese does TV **AND MORE!**

Highway star

Drive → Icon Home Entertainment → Region B BD

This award-winning crime drama zooms onto Blu-ray. Turn to p103 to see if it gets the chequered flag or is stuck in the pits



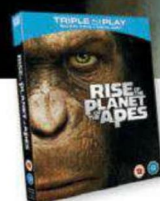
HCC Ratings key

Sebastian Vettel	1 2 3 4 5
Lewis Hamilton	1 2 3 4 5
Nico Rosberg	1 2 3 4 5
Sergio Perez	1 2 3 4 5
Miss Daisy	1 2 3 4 5

The film's stars
were happy to
work for peanuts

King of the swingers

Hollywood isn't monkeying around with its new Planet of the Apes prequel



→ Rise of the Planet of the Apes

Maybe it was the horrible aftertaste of what Tim Burton's nonsensical remake did to the franchise, but for some reason nobody really expected too much from this contemporary prequel to the beloved 1968 sci-fi classic. But, thanks to its smart storytelling, winning performances and groundbreaking visual effects (a vital issue here, as the main character is a combination of CG effects and Andy 'King Kong' Serkis' motion-captured performance) *Rise...* is up there as one of the year's best blockbusters.

Picture: It's also one of the year's best-looking Blu-rays. The clarity of the AVC 2.40:1 18p encode is so affecting that the opening move down through the jungle canopy has a vertiginous sense of depth that beats out many genuine 3D discs we've seen. And, while, colour reproduction and black levels also impress, it's the astonishing detail level of the CG apes that'll have you hitting the pause button.

Audio: Packed with dynamic surround effects and (very) deep bass, *Rise...*'s DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is every bit the match to the astonishing visuals. Whether it's the buzz of activity in the

labs (Chapter 2), the swirl of leaves falling from the treetops while apes rush from the front to the rear of the soundstage (Chapter 23), or the showdown between apes and police on the Golden Gate Bridge (Chapters 25-26), this mix is bursting with life and utterly convincing in creating a 3D soundscape.

Extras: Unsurprisingly, the lion's share of the extras on 20th Century Fox's HD platter focus on the creation of the movie's monkey marauders. These take the form of three featurettes – *The Genius of Andy Serkis*, *A New Generation of Apes* and *Breaking Motion Capture Boundaries* – plus a multi-angle scene breakdown and a character concept art gallery.

Other features include a pair commentaries by the director and writers that are well worth checking out; a featurette about the film's score; a look at the film's many nods to the original *Planet of the Apes* entitled *Mythology of the Apes*, eleven deleted scenes in various states of completion; three trailers; a trio of educational vignettes about apes; and a BD-Live link.

A DVD and Digital Copy are also included. **AvB**

HCC VERDICT

Rise of the Planet of the Apes: Triple Play → 20th Century Fox → All-region BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx

We say: Sci-fi hit on a Blu-ray disc with real AV ape-peal

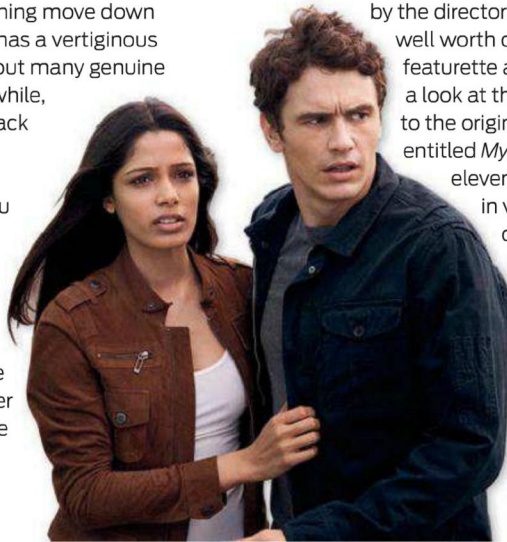
Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



The Hangover Part II: Triple Play

Warner Home Video → All-region
BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx



Lightning fails to strike twice with this disappointing sequel to the 2009 comedy smash. While there

was a hint of danger to the original, this outing is much darker in tone and offers fewer laughs as it retreads the same story concept in a different location. On the plus side, the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode is a corker, crammed with a breathtaking amount of detail, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics are surprisingly dynamic for a comedy. Extras include a gag reel, spoof documentary, three featurettes, plus a DVD and Digital Copy of the film. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Guard

StudioCanal → Region B BD
£20 Approx



There are plenty of laughs on offer in this smart comedy about an unconventional small-town Irish cop

(Brendan Gleeson) who ends up working with an FBI agent (Don Cheadle) investigating a team of international drug smugglers.

StudioCanal's Blu-ray release is just as pleasing as the film itself. The colourful AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode packs plenty of punch, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio copes admirably with the many accents on offer. A commentary from the director and stars is offered alongside a *Making of...* featurette, short film and more. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Inbetweeners Movie: Triple Play

4DVD → Region B BD
£28 Approx



This cinematic spin-off from the popular Channel 4 sitcom follows in the footsteps of

countless predecessors by packing its cast off on a foreign holiday. Making up for the lack of originality are a few decent laughs and outrageous escapades. Although the HD imagery is reasonably sharp and colourful, it's disappointing to see yet another UK film getting a 1080i encode. At least there's nothing technically wrong with the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. Extras include an extended cut and multiple commentaries. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Most Wanted

HCC's ten most eagerly-anticipated Blu-rays hitting the UK in February...



1. Warrior
2. Don't be Afraid of the Dark
3. Real Steel
4. Lady & the Tramp: Diamond Edition

5. The Three Musketeers 3D

6. Repo Man: Masters of Cinema

7. To Kill a Mockingbird: 50th Anniversary Edition

8. Fright Night 3D

9. The Ides of March

10. The Twilight Zone: Season Five



Scandinavian shaky-cam

Norwegian students are trolling for trouble in the latest 'found footage' sensation

→ Troll Hunter

Equal parts *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield*, this darkly funny Norwegian flick follows three college students making a documentary about bear attacks. The wannabe-filmmakers' focus soon shifts to an alleged poacher whose refusal to let them interview him only makes them more determined. What they don't realise is that the mystery man actually works for a top-secret branch of the government, hunting and killing dangerous trolls that escape from their territories.

It's a great idea and one that the filmmakers clearly had a blast working with – especially when it comes to the delightful fairytale design employed for the various trolls on show. Straddling the horror-comedy line with surprising ease, *Troll Hunter* is one of the year's most unexpected treats. So do yourself and favour and hunt down a copy to watch.

Picture: Thanks to its commitment to prosumer-grade visual authenticity, the so-called 'found footage' aesthetic hardly prides itself on delivering superb hi-def imagery. But *Troll Hunter's* AVC 1.78:1 1080p encode holds up better than most. Yes, the flaws in the source material are readily apparent (crushed blacks here, weak detailing in subdued lighting there), but there's also plenty to admire. When the action takes place in broad daylight the imagery is colourful and sharp, and even during the nighttime shoots, it manages to draw plenty of detail out of the CG beasts.

Audio: While it's easy to find some inherent flaws in this Blu-ray's hi-def visuals, it's considerably more difficult to find anything to moan about when it comes to the audio. The film tries to tell

you that all of the audio was recorded on location by a sound engineer with a boom mike, but the truth is that this is an extremely competent and very aggressive DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix (in both the original Norwegian and an English dub). Whenever a troll hits the screen the mix is cranked up to 'eleven', never more so than in the final confrontation with the towering Jotnar (Chapter 11), where the booming bass of its footsteps and anguished howls reverberate around you.

Extras: Fans get a reasonable collection of extra features to explore here. As well as five deleted scenes and three extended scenes, Momentum Pictures has gathered two improvised sequences, a blooper reel, a collection of short visual effects featurettes (*Visual Effects Breakdown: Ringlefinch, Digital Models, Jotnar and Tosserland & Mountain Kings*), seven behind-the-scenes vignettes, two photo galleries, a HDNET promo featurette and the theatrical trailer. And all but the latter are presented in hi-def). **AvB**



HCC VERDICT

Troll Hunter → Momentum Pictures → Region B BD
£20 Approx

We say: Surprisingly good hi-def package for this charming Norwegian 'handycam' horror'

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Online trolls have nothing on this guy

The older he
got, the harder
Harry found
it stay off
the booze



One enchanted ending

This foreboding finale will drive fans wild with its magical Blu-ray bonus features

→ Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2

That's it then. The *Harry Potter* saga has finally come to an end. And while it's been an uneven ride, it's hard to deny that this last film sends the franchise off in style in a way that, say, *Police Academy VII* never quite managed.

Having done the majority of the exposition in the first part of the *Deathly Hallows*, this second instalment can get straight down to business. Cue a daring raid on Gringotts, the Death Eaters waging war on the staff and students at Hogwarts, and Harry finally facing off in a fight-to-the-death with Lord Voldemort.

None of this will mean anything to people who haven't been following the series to date. And even those who have seen them all, but don't remember every last detail, are left to fend for themselves: which may leave you wondering just who some of the characters are, what they're doing and why you should even care.

Picture: Sadly, Warner refused to make the 3D Blu-ray available for review. So the comments here only apply to the 2D edition.

Visually, this film feels very much akin with its predecessor, if not marginally darker. This has the unfortunate side-effect of making some shots almost impenetrable, even on a calibrated screen set-up. Otherwise the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode is just as strong as ever, drawing the best out of the desaturated palette and filling the picture with



HCC VERDICT

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2 – Triple Play → Warner Home Video
All-region BD/R2 DVD
£25 Approx

We say: Potter works his magic on Blu-ray one last time

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

fine detail during close-ups (just check out the final shots of Voldemort in Chapter 26).

Audio: Potter's final adventure sounds goes out with a bang, audio-wise. The DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix flexes its muscles with the raid on Gringotts (Chapters 5–6) and then barely stops to catch its breath as it rattles through the battle for Hogwarts (Chapters 14 and 16) and a fiery escape from Draco's goons (Chapter 15). In fact, right through to the final showdown between the forces of good and evil, this is precise and powerful stuff.

Extras: While early *...Potter* films were (rightly) criticised for the quality of their extras, things have improved significantly across the past few releases. And this Blu-ray package continues that upward trend.

Alongside the 130-min film itself, Disc One also offers a brilliant *Maximum Movie Mode* (hosted by actor Matthew Lewis) that offers behind-the-scenes videos, links to eight *Focus Point* featurettes, deleted footage, interviews and some handy backstory info for some of the characters and magical objects. The *Focus Points* can also be viewed directly from the menu, as can a short cast and crew *Final Farewell* featurette.

Disc Two conjures up a fun 52-minute chat with author JK Rowling and star Daniel Radcliffe, a 48-min *Making of...* documentary, a pair of featurettes, eight deleted scenes and promos for the *Warner Bros Studio Tour London* and *Pottermore* website. A DVD and Digital Copy are also included. **AvB**

Arriety

StudioCanal → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Even though he only served as co-writer and producer, legendary animator Hayao Miyazaki's

fingerprints are all over this charming take on Mary Norton's perennial favourite *The Borrowers*. Beautifully animated and boasting a surfeit of both heart and imagination, it's a absorbing film – and one that truly shines on Blu-ray HD thanks to the disc's vibrant AVC 1.85:1 1080p visuals (let down only by some minor ringing) and surprisingly expansive DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix (in Japanese or English). Extras include picture-in-picture storyboards and a variety of interviews. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Apollo 18

Entertainment in Video → Region B BD → £20 Approx



If *Troll Hunter* hasn't quenched your thirst for 'handycam horror' this month, then there's always this

sci-fi shocker. Supposedly edited together from footage of a top-secret NASA trip to the moon in the '70s, the film scores highly for authentic production design, but fails to do anything truly interesting with its concept. The variety of archival film formats are emulated with aplomb, but leave the AVC 1080p encode with little to shout about. Thankfully, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is more eventful. Extras include a commentary and multiple alternate endings. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Guilty of Romance

Eureka! → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Japanese cult director Sion 'Love Exposure' Sono is back with the final part of his thematically-linked

'Hate Trilogy', interweaving the stories of three women connected by a brutal murder. While not as satisfying as Sono's previous films, this could be down to the fact that the disc only includes the 113-minute international cut, rather than the 144-minute original edit. The disc's AVC 1.85:1 encode suffers from black crush, but is otherwise fine, as is the LPCM 2.0 audio. Extras consist of a chat-track, interview and trailer. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Arena

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Samuel L. Jackson goes on a scenery-chewing rampage as the money-hungry villain in this

low-budget flick about a kidnapped man forced to fight to the death for an illegal website. The direct-to-DVD nature of the film is exemplified by the complete lack of bonus features on the disc itself (although a generic BD-Live portal is present). The AVC 2.40:1 1080p encodes looks a little flat at times, but otherwise copes rather well with the film's high-contrast, pop video aesthetic. Just as good is the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, which offers more wallop than the film's hero. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Walk like an Egyptian

Hollywood gets its fingers burnt while Taylor and Burton's passion smoulders

→ Cleopatra

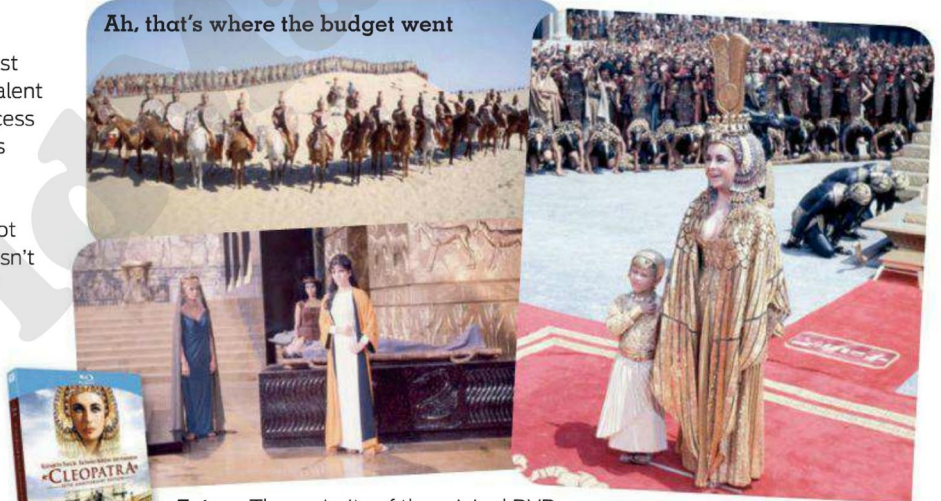
Joseph L. Mankiewicz's 1963 historical epic cost a spectacular \$44million to make (the equivalent of around \$300million today) and in the process almost brought studio 20th Century Fox to its knees. Unfortunately, the film's tortuous production is a more entertaining tale than the one *Cleopatra* itself serves up. Okay, it's not a bad film, just a rather average one – which isn't really what you want from such a ridiculously costly endeavour.

Picture: Shot using the large-format 65mm Todd-AO format, *Cleopatra* comes to Blu-ray with a beautifully remastered image that makes the most of the film stock's abundance of detail and exquisite colour reproduction.

With the movie running for more than four hours (the original workprint ran for six, but the cut footage is now presumed destroyed) Fox has sensibly split it across two Blu-ray platters. The result is an AVC 2.20:1 1080p encode that dispenses with the obvious shimmering that troubled the DVD release and finally lets the film's epic visuals and lavish production design look their best. Magnificent.

Audio: For such an epic endeavour, *Cleopatra* is a surprisingly dialogue-driven piece of cinema. As such, a lot of the audio is directed at the front of the soundstage in the DTS-HD MA 5.1 and Dolby Digital 4.0 mixes included on this Blu-ray. The lossless mix has an improved tonal range over the lousy 4.0 track, and a more natural sense of spatial effects in those moments where the entire soundstage does come into play.

Ah, that's where the budget went



Extras: The majority of the original DVD extras are present, namely the two-hour *Cleopatra: The Film that Changed Hollywood*

doc, two archive *Fox Movietone News* clips, an archival *Making of...* promo, a trio of trailers and the audio commentary. There are items missing though: are a trio of advance trailers and five extensive stills galleries.

Making up for that is a quartet of excellent new features. There's an episode of *Fox Movie Channel Presents Fox Legacy* dedicated to the film's history, a featurette looking at the changing representations of Cleopatra through history, a second featurette discussing the film's lost footage and why it's probably lost for good, and – best of all – reproductions of correspondence between Fox publicists Jack Brodsky and Nathan Weiss that give a wonderful taste of the chaos surrounding the film's production and its stars' affair. **AvB**

HCC VERDICT

Cleopatra: 50th Anniversary Edition → 20th Century Fox All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: A suitably opulent BD outing for this overblown epic

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

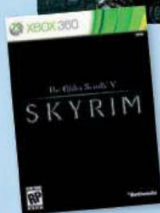
Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Arcade action

Big screen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. Check out these two videogames vying for time on your home cinema system...

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Bethesda → Xbox 360/PS3/PC → £50 Approx



Bethesda's latest open-world role-playing game doesn't try to redefine the genre. Indeed, the story it tells packs in pretty much every fantasy cliché you can think of (including your own character, who just happens to be the return of a line of mystical

warriors long thought vanished from the realm, blah, blah, blah...). But what ...*Skyrim* does so well is refine the genre and deliver an awesome gaming experience.

One of its chief pleasures comes from the astonishing world Bethesda has created – a land of incredible scope and diverse locations, packed with villages, caverns, towns and crypts crying out to be explored – and this graphically-rich fantasy land looks sensational on a bigscreen. However, like *Fallout 3* before it, the sheer scope and diversity comes at a cost – pop-up and other graphical glitches raise their head occasionally, while loading times can be incredibly long. But even these flaws fail to break the spell ...*Skyrim* casts over the player, one aided by a sumptuous 5.1 mix that ensures you are drawn into its world.

Add to this a wide variety of enemies to combat, characters to befriend, missions and side-quests to be discovered, magic to be learnt, skills to develop and melee combat to perfect and you have a game that could keep you going for months.

1 2 3 4 5

Rage

Bethesda → Xbox 360/PS3/PC → £50 Approx



With a legacy that includes *Doom*, *Quake* and various sequels to both, it's hardly surprising that any new game from developer id Software carries an incredible weight of expectation.

Set in a post-apocalyptic future, *Rage* comes across as a slightly uncomfortable mix of id's own first-person shooters, publisher Bethesda's *Fallout 3* and the *Twisted Metal* driving games. Like Bethesda's futuristic RPG, *Rage* takes place in a desolate world of ruined cities, barren landscapes and Western-influenced townships built out of scrap. It's a compelling, if slightly familiar world, and one that looks absolutely mind-blowing thanks to id's incredible graphics engine. And the accompanying surround mix is no slouch either. It keeps you on your toes with eerie effects as you explore a seemingly deserted location, before exploding into life as mutants attack.

But while the first-person shooter sections feel reasonably weighty and look beautiful, they fail to do anything new to the genre. And the driving sections are surprisingly simplistic and uninvolved – which is a real shame as they are the only way to get around the game world, and the entire focus of id's multiplayer ambitions for the title. Disappointing.



1 2 3 4 5

The Phantom of the Opera: UE

Park Circus → Region B BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx



While still showing plenty of signs of wear and tear, this Blu-ray release of the 1925 horror classic is a delightful package for fans of silent cinema. Not only does it offer up an AVC 1.33:1 1080p encode of the 78-minute original edit (with a choice of two LPCM 2.0 scores), it also features an AVC 1.33:1 1080i presentation of the

91-minute 1929 re-release edit with additional talking sequences and all-new opera set-pieces. Extras include a superb photo and art gallery, a fascinating commentary for the 1929 edit by a film historian, and a bonus DVD with even more goodies. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Two-Lane Blacktop: Limited Edition

Eureka! → Region B BD → £25 Approx



Eureka's ongoing deal with Universal for titles to distribute under its acclaimed 'Masters of Cinema' banner continues this month with Monte Hellman's 1971 cult classic. Originally thought to be the successor to *Easy Rider*, the film flopped on its original release. But, while it definitely looks and feels like a product

of its time, there's still plenty to enjoy about this tale of disillusioned youth. This excellent BD package features a AVC 2.35:1 1080p encode, DTS-HD MA 2.0 and 5.1 audio, a Music and Effects track, commentary, interviews and more. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Legend

20th Century Fox → All-region BD → £20 Approx



High fantasy never felt like a natural fit for Ridley Scott, which only serves to make his mid-'80s genre outing all the more interesting. This UK Blu-ray serves up pleasing AVC 2.35:1 1080p encodes of both the 94-min European Theatrical Cut and 113-min Director's Cut (despite some source issues with the latter). But, that's

where the good news ends. While the shorter cut has a DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, the other is stuck with a 'lossy' DD5.1 mix – Universal's US BD offers lossless mixes for both versions. It also lacks all of the extras from the US release, bar the trailer. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Frankenhooker

Arrow Video → Region x BD → £25 Approx



Now here's a film I never expected to see released on Blu-ray. Frank 'Basket Case' Henenlotter brought his own unique spin on *Frankenstein* with this tongue-in-cheek tale of a young scientist who builds a new body for his girlfriend out of the parts of prostitutes when she dies in a freak lawnmower accident. This unexpected

Blu-ray release features a suitably grainy AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode that copes well with the film's neon colour palette, and a nicely cleaned-up LPCM mono soundtrack. Extras include a surprisingly frank commentary and interviews. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Reverse parking – the nemesis of many a professional wheelman



The road to perfection

Possibly the best film of 2011 makes its BD debut with an equally brilliant AV package

→ Drive

How do you follow up an existential viking movie? If you're *Valhalla Rising* director Nicolas Winding Refn you do it by leaving your native Denmark, heading to Hollywood, and making the best Michael Mann movie Michael Mann never made.

Adapted from a book by James Sallis, *Drive* stars Ryan Gosling as a movie stuntman who spends his nights moonlighting as a getaway driver. But when he makes a connection to a neighbour (Carey Mulligan) his carefully controlled life takes a several wrong turns. What follows is both surprisingly tender and shockingly violent.

Picture: It comes as no real surprise to learn that 2011's best-looking film makes for a gorgeous hi-def experience. There are sharper 1080p encodes out there and more detailed ones as well, but there are very few Blu-rays that look so effortlessly cinematic.

From the golden autumnal hues accompanying the majority of the daytime scenes to the washes of blue and red, accompanied by suffocating blacks, during nocturnal shots, this AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode handles everything that is asked of it with precision and consummate ease. And for those of you who require something with a little more pop – just take a look at the vibrancy and fine detailing evident in the shots down the aisles of the Big 6 Market in Chapter 2, or the close-up of Ron Perlman's eyes in Chapter 9, for some eye-popping treats.

Audio: Even if *Drive*'s DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics aren't always as dynamic as you might imagine, this is still a remarkably accomplished mix and ranks amongst my favourite Blu-ray soundtracks.

Given the movie's rather taciturn protagonist, the film's narrative is driven by atmospheric and music rather than dialogue – employing audio elements such as a persistent rumble of bass (like something out of David Lynch's *Eraserhead*) to build an atmosphere of dread and heighten the tension. Even more satisfying is the quality of the music reproduction. From the first electronic beats of Kavinsky's *Nightcall* over the main titles in Chapter 2 you'll be struck by the incredible tonal range and depth. A good example of a subtle surround mix.

Extras: With no commentary track or *Making of...* included, the closest you get to any discussion of the film's production is a 41-min Q&A with *Drive*'s director.

Thankfully, it's a great chat. Winding Refn kicks things off with an apology ('I'm sorry I said f**k on BBC this morning') before launching into a discussion of casting, violence and archetypal characters. He even finds time to chat about *The Dying of the Light*, a Harrison Ford film he was set to direct before the star starting changing things ('I was so happy I got to kill Harrison Ford, but then Harrison decided not to die').

The remaining extras take the form of the theatrical trailer, a TV spot, plus a gallery of film stills, poster concepts and illustrations. **AvB**



HCC VERDICT

Drive → Icon Home Entertainment → Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: While lacking in extras, the stunning AV quality ensures *Drive* is a real Blu-ray joyride

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Crème de Menthe was surprisingly popular with bootleggers in the 1920s



Beer today, gone tomorrow

A stunning Blu-ray boxset ensures this Prohibition-era crime series steals the plaudits

→ Boardwalk Empire: The Complete First Season



The home of *The Sopranos* is dipping its toe into the world of organised crime once again. Only this time around HBO has set its sights on Prohibition-era Atlantic City and its corrupt city treasurer Enoch 'Nucky' Thompson (Steve Buscemi). Add to that the presence of Martin Scorsese as executive producer (and director of the pilot episode) and it's small wonder that *Boardwalk Empire* is the smartest and most compelling show around.

Picture: Unlike some other studios and distributors we could mention, HBO refuses to simply cram as many episodes of a TV show as possible onto a single Blu-ray disc. While this need to spread a show across additional discs pushes up costs, it also ensures that every show looks fantastic in HD, and *Boardwalk Empire* is as good an example as you'll ever come across.

Ranged over five BD platters, this handsome crime show looks positively resplendent. Each of the AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes is a thing of beauty, highlighting the show's lavish production values and maintaining a cinematic feel. Detailing is impeccable across the board, colours are invitingly rich and there's an impressive clarity and precision to the image that doesn't rely on artificial sharpening. In other words, everything you want the format to offer to a TV production.

Audio: While it doesn't quite measure up to the image quality, *Boardwalk Empire*'s DTS-HD Master

Audio 5.1 mixes are still satisfying. Like the vast majority of TV productions, most of the mix is centred on the front of the soundstage. This is no bad thing, though, as the nature of the drama means that it's primarily driven by dialogue, and it benefits here from crystal-clear presentation and rich tonality.

When needs be, *Boardwalk Empire* also makes effective use of the more spacious soundfield, creating excellent atmospheric effects for the bustling club interiors and the people-packed seafront of Atlantic City. So, even if it won't win any awards for advancements in surround sound mixing, this boxset's acoustic quality is enough to ensure that it's the perfect complement to the HD visuals.

Extras: Six of the twelve audio episodes feature commentaries by various members of the cast and crew (but not Scorsese, sadly, even though there is one for his episode) and there's also a character guide and the usual behind-the-scenes featurettes (*Atlantic City: The Original Sin City*, *Speakeasy Tour*, *Making Boardwalk Empire* and *Creating the Boardwalk*). But the real surprise is the excellent Enhanced Viewing Mode available on each episode. This interactive picture-in-picture feature delivers interviews with the programme's creators, cast and crew; historical facts about the people and places featured in the show; location information and complete versions of some of the period songs featured in the series. **AvB**

HCC VERDICT

Boardwalk Empire: The Complete First Season → HBO
All-region BD → £50 Approx

We say: It would be a crime not to buy this BD package

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

The Smurfs 3D

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£25 Approx



When it was originally announced, Hollywood's take on Peyo's beloved blue creatures was greeted by the kind of reception usually reserved for the perpetrators of war crimes. As it happens, *The Smurfs* proves to be a perfectly entertaining flick that will delight its juvenile target audience. More discerning viewers will also find plenty to enjoy about the BD platter. The MVC 1.85:1 1080p 3D encode (also viewable in 2D) looks great and the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio is pleasingly robust. The disc also offers plenty of extras, including a pair of chat-tracks and a set-top game. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

TT3D: Closer to the Edge

EntertainmentOne → Region B BD/
R2 DVD → £20 Approx

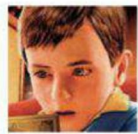


Between *Senna* and this fascinating film about the Isle of Man TT Race, 2011 will be fondly remembered as a great year for documentaries about motorsports. This handsome Blu-ray package presents the film in both 2D and the original 3D (via an MVC 1.78:1 1080p encode) and looks pretty damn good. The added depth of the stereoscopic presentation isn't exactly necessary to your enjoyment, but it's still a lot of fun. The disc also includes additional interviews and a bonus doc about the first ever zero-emission TT grand prix. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

The Polar Express 3D

Warner Home Video → All-Region BD
£28 Approx



This third Blu-ray (and second stereoscopic) platter for Robert Zemeckis' animated festive feature finally brings the film home in Full HD 3D. But does it make much of a difference? Not really. While an improvement on the previous anaglyph release, this MVC 2.40:1 3D presentation suffers from some obvious ghosting issues and image depth is surprisingly average. It also does nothing to make the soulless, automaton-like characters any less creepy. The set also includes the 2D Blu-ray disc (with original extras), plus a DVD and Digital Copy. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Spy Kids: All the Time in the World 4D

Entertainment in Video
Region B BD → £20 Approx



While *The Smurfs* proved to be a fairly pleasant surprise, the same can definitely not be said of Robert Rodriguez's 4D reboot of his *Spy Kids* franchise. What's 4D, you ask? Why, it's 3D with the addition of a scratch-and-sniff card, of course! Unfortunately, while the disc delivers a lovely MVC 1.85:1 1080p encode capable of generating a good sense of depth and lively DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics, the film itself is awful, the extras are minimal and the scratch-and-sniff card almost entirely reeks of bubblegum. **MC**

1 2 3 4 5

Don't fear the 3D Reaper

Horror franchise bounces back with squirm-inducing stereoscopic scares

→ Final Destination 5

The fifth outing in this popular horror series gets the franchise back on track after the disappointing fourth flick. The setup is still the same as ever, but the ensuing scenes of stereoscopic slaughter are more mischievous and distressing than ever (Eye surgery! Acupuncture!). It also finds time to add a new wrinkle to the series' mythology. Great fun.

Picture: Vibrant colours and meticulous delineation are the two main strengths of the 2D disc's AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode. While some minor edge-enhancement holds it back from getting top marks, there's a lot to like about this hi-def presentation, particularly the fine detailing evident throughout – particularly noticeable in the repeated close-ups of an eyeball during the laser surgery in Chapter 6.

A separate disc houses a technically-proficient 3D MVC 2.40:1 1080p presentation of the film that proves how well-suited horror is to stereoscopic cinema. The opening credits alone are packed with sharp edges jutting out of the screen. And when the movie itself gets underway you're treated to such delights as a mast rupturing a young woman's stomach and spraying entrails at the screen. Lovely.

Audio: *Final Destination 5* begins with one of the most thunderous (and lengthiest) title sequences I've seen in ages. But at least the ensuing cacophony prepares you for what to expect from the film's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. Starting with the vision of the collapsing bridge in Chapter 2, all of the death scenes are accompanied by perfectly positioned and frequently very aggressive surround effects that prove a great match for the eye-popping 3D effects. At other times the audio



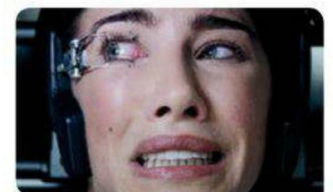
There's always at least one nutter on every bus



is more biased towards the front speakers, but even these moments impress with their clarity.

Extras: Bonus features are surprisingly few and far between on this Blu-ray outing. The 2D platter can only muster Warner's generic BD-Live link, two alternate death scenes (both only slightly variations on what made it into the film), a pair of splitscreen visual effects reels comparing dailies footage and animatics to the finished version, and a brief promo featurette that tells you next to nothing about the actual making of the film but lets you know that everyone had great fun doing it. And other than the stereoscopic presentation of the film itself, the 3D disc has nothing extra to add.

In fact, the most notable thing about *FD5* on Blu-ray is the inclusion of the UK's first UltraViolet Digital Copy (see p10 for more on this) alongside a bonus DVD of the movie. **AvB**



HCC VERDICT

Final Destination 5 in 3D → All-region BD/R2 DVD → Warner Home Video → £28 Approx

We say: Plenty of 3D thrills, but disappointingly thin on extras

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Demo screen

Keep your home cinema setup on the right track with this hi-def train crash from **Super 8** on Blu-ray



Super 8

Paramount Home Entertainment → All-Region BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx

Time code: 015.38 – 021.48



'Production value!' yells wannabe filmmaker Charles Kaznyk (Riley Griffiths) as he spots a train heading towards the old depot where he and his teenage friends are filming his zombie spectacular. The shocking event that suddenly unfolds on screen definitely adds some genuine 'production value' to director JJ Abrams' latest blockbuster.

Up until this point Abrams' film had been a relatively modest tale of teenage friendship and loss. But this astonishing train crash catapults the movie in a whole new direction – and in the process delivers

the most powerful piece of surround sound imaging we've heard for a very long time, captured perfectly by this Blu-ray's Dolby TrueHD 7.1 soundtrack.

Head-on collision

It all starts so simply: the low rumble of bass as the train appears in the distance. Only the sharp metallic reverberation of the track itself leads you to think that something could be amiss. The train then rushes from the rear right speaker into the front of the soundstage before zooming past the platform the kids are filming on.

Suddenly a car peels onto the track and drives head-first into the train. The ensuing

explosion rips through the train and your subwoofer, and then everything goes to hell. Thanks to the precise dynamics of the 7.1 mix you're right there with the young 'uns as they flee for their lives. Metal screeches fill the speakers as carriages hit one another, and the one that hits the depot, causing another explosion, will test the limits of your subwoofer (and the patience of your neighbours). Then come more massive bass impacts as *something* tries to escape from a carriage, eventually launching the door into the air, arcing over your head.

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SELECT

→ **Buying Guide** Looking to purchase a new TV, AVR, speaker set, PJ, media player, BD deck, or surround sound system? Our Buying Guide is here to help. It's updated every issue with the latest reviews, and highlights the major specs so you can see at a glance what kit is right for you. And remember that the prices listed are the original RRP's – shop around and you'll often find them for less!



HCC Ratings key

- Officially awesome 1 2 3 4 5
- Essential purchase 1 2 3 4 5
- Does the job 1 2 3 4 5
- Disappointing 1 2 3 4 5
- Don't touch it 1 2 3 4 5

TV screens



NEW ENTRY

Manufacturer	Model	Price	Size (inches)	3D type	Panel type	HDMI	Component	PC	Networking	Internet TV	Wi-fi ready	Freeview HD	Freesat HD	Issue	Rating	Comment
Hannspree	SV28LMMB	£200	28	-	LED	2	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	203	12345	Second-room TV. 16:10 ratio
LG	50PZ950T	£1,600	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	196	12345	Excellent all rounder, minor judder
LG	47LW550T	£1,200	47	P	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Web browser is multimedia icing
LG	50PX990	£1,600	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	192	12345	Adds 3D to the 50PK990
LG	42LV450U	£530	42	-	LED	3	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	200	12345	Lacks Freeview HD and net features
LG	55LW980T	£2,500	55	P	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	202	12345	Rear LED, passive TV is superb
Loewe	Individual Compose 3D	£5,000	46	A	LED	3	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	202	12345	Debut 3D screen offers motorised control and built-in HDD
Loewe	Individual 40	£5,500	40	-	LED	3	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	192	12345	Exquisite design and performance
Panasonic	TX-P55VT30	£2,700	55	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	197	12345	Sublime plasma is best-in-class
Panasonic	TX-L37DT30	£950	37	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	196	12345	Do-it-all 3D capable thin screen
Panasonic	TX-L42E3B	£600	42	-	LED	3	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	200	12345	No frills 42in LED seems expensive
Panasonic	TX-P50GT30	£1,800	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	195	12345	Stunning 2D and 3D mid-ranger
Panasonic	TX-P42ST30	£1,200	42	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	198	12345	Entry-level 3D plasma
Philips	40PFL8605	£1,300	40	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	192	12345	Accomplished 2D pics. Poor X-talk
Philips	Cinema 21:9	£4,000	58	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	190	12345	Faultless movie viewing
Samsung	UE40D6530	£1,100	40	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	198	12345	Brilliant pictures and Smart skills
Samsung	UE40D7000	£1,400	40	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	197	12345	Gorgeous TV, superb performance
Samsung	UE55D8000	£2,500	55	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	196	12345	Minor 3D X-talk, otherwise stunning
Samsung	UE60D8000	£4,300	60	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	200	12345	Big screen comes with a big price
Samsung	UE40D5520	£600	40	-	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	200	12345	Superb budget set is hard to fault
Samsung	P550C6900	£1,300	50	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	191	12345	Great value for money, decent pics
Samsung	P551D6900	£1,000	51	A	PDP	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	198	12345	Aggressively priced 3D bigscreen
Sharp	LC-37LE320	£700	37	-	LED	3	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	194	12345	Tasty set suited to a second room
Sharp	LC-46LE831E	£1,300	46	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	199	12345	Sharp's best LED screen ever
Sony	KDL-40CX523	£550	40	-	CCFL	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	200	12345	CCFL screen packs tons of features
Sony	KDL-40HX723	£1,300	40	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	201	12345	Excellent bigscreen all-rounder
Sony	KDL-40EX524	£800	40	-	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	197	12345	Great features, decent 2D-only pics
Sony	KDL-40NX713	£1,000	40	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	193	12345	Needs optional transmitter for 3D
Toshiba	42RL853	£600	42	-	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	199	12345	Affordable 42incher with few frills
Toshiba	42HL833	£500	42	-	LED	2	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	200	12345	Good HD pics but only two HDMI
Toshiba	47VL863	£900	47	P	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	201	12345	Suffers from limited contrast
Toshiba	46VL758	£1,500	46	-	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	192	12345	Undone by inconsistent backlight
Toshiba	55WL863	£1,800	55	A	LED	4	1	1	+	+	+	+	+	203	12345	CEVO-powered TV is first-rate

NEW ENTRY

A= Active. P= Passive

TV SCREENS EXPLAINED...

PLASMA VS LCD. PLUS, 3D'S RIVAL SYSTEMS

The TV market is becoming increasingly dominated by LED-lit LCD screens that are much thinner than traditional cold cathode fluorescent lamp (CCFL) screens. For 42in and above, plasma display panels (PDPs) come into play. These generally offer superior black levels, better viewing angles and less 3D cross-talk, but less brightness.

Most 3D screens feature the Active system that uses expensive powered 3D specs to deliver full HD images to each eye. Passive 3D TVs have a filter over the screen and use non-powered specs with polarising filters. The glasses are cheap as chips, but the resolution of 3D is halved to 540 lines.

Editor's Choice...

SAMSUNG

55in → UE55D8000 → £2,500 Approx

Samsung's cost-no-object 9000 series launched in 2010 but still tops the brand's range – however, if you want Samsung's most technologically advanced screen then look no further than its 2011 8000 series. Stunning looks with pics to match.

Tested: Issue 196

For more info visit: www.samsung.co.uk



Blu-ray players



Manufacturer	Model	Price	BD Live storage	3D	Multi-channel analogue out	HDMI	USB	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	DVD-Audio/SACD	Issue	Rating	Comment
Arcam	FMJ-BDP100	£1,000	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Rock-solid build quality and pics to match
Cambridge Audio	Azur 650BD	£400	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	184	1 2 3 4 5	Top-notch build pays dividends with 2D fodder
Cambridge Audio	Azur 751BD	£800	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	199	1 2 3 4 5	Universal deck performs well, needs more 'net
Denon	DBP-1611UD	£400	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Awful GUI but 3D pics are as good as it gets
Denon	DBP-2012UD	£750	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	198	1 2 3 4 5	High-performance player with battleship build
Denon	Cara	£2,000	+	+	+	4	+	+	+	+	185	1 2 3 4 5	With built-in 5 x 75W digital amp
Dune	Smart BI	£240	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	198	1 2 3 4 5	Advanced networking features will wow techies
LG	BX580	£150	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	189	1 2 3 4 5	Reasonable BD pics, messy DVD upscaler
LG	BD670	£170	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	1 2 3 4 5	Smart BD player offers great value
Marantz	UD7006	£800	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	200	1 2 3 4 5	Superior AV performance and tasty design
NAD	M56	£1,900	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	183	1 2 3 4 5	Motion processing issues spoil the day
Onkyo	BD-SP808	£500	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	195	1 2 3 4 5	Accomplished disc spinner. Slow disc loader
Onkyo	BD-SP809	£500	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	203	1 2 3 4 5	Performs well, but lacks features for this price
Oppo	BDP-95EU	£900	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	197	1 2 3 4 5	Even better build and results than the BDP-93EU
Oppo	BDP-93EU	£500	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	195	1 2 3 4 5	Awesomely good video and music performance
Oppo	BDP-83SE	£1,300	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	190	1 2 3 4 5	Precision engineered analogue audio output
Panasonic	DMP-BD75	£110	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	196	1 2 3 4 5	OK images, quick loader, underwhelming to use
Panasonic	DMP-BDT310	£260	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Terrific new GUI, refined sound and pictures
Panasonic	DMP-BDT300	£260	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Versatile, aging deck. Look out for discounts
Panasonic	BFT800EBK	£650	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	192	1 2 3 4 5	Built-in soundbar and iPod dock. Great 3D pics
Philips	BDP7600	£200	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	198	1 2 3 4 5	Feature-heavy deck with open web browser
Philips	BDP7500 MKII	£200	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Slickly designed with decent 2D and 3D images
Pioneer	BDP-LX53	£400	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	187	1 2 3 4 5	Basic and slow to load but impressive BD pics
Samsung	BD-D7500	£250	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	198	1 2 3 4 5	Style-centric wall-mountable 3D player
Samsung	BD-D6900	£300	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	195	1 2 3 4 5	Decent BD deck with built-in Freeview HD tuner
Samsung	BD-C6900	£255	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Quick loader, versatile deck. Passable pictures
Sharp	BD-HP90S	£290	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Slot-loading vertical design, expensive
Sony	BDP-S380	£130	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	1 2 3 4 5	Budget player misses out on 3D and networking
Sony	BDP-S480	£150	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	198	1 2 3 4 5	Brilliant deck offers superior VOD at a low price
Sony	BDP-SX1	£300	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	202	1 2 3 4 5	Portable, WSVGA resolution, but outputs Full HD
Toshiba	BDX3100	£185	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Feature-light but does the job with solid pics
Toshiba	BDX3200	£150	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	197	1 2 3 4 5	Unexciting player can't compete with rivals
Yamaha	BD-A1010	£500	+	+	+	2	+	+	+	+	203	1 2 3 4 5	Universal deck with a few flaws
Yamaha	BD-S667	£300	+	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	189	1 2 3 4 5	Impressive but best partnered to a Yamaha AVR

NEW ENTRY

NEW ENTRY

BLU-RAY EXPLAINED...

MATCHING YOUR DECK TO YOUR AMP

Blu-ray decks are designed to deliver top-notch images (some do it much better than others of course) but Blu-ray is also about enjoying superior quality sound. When choosing a deck, bear in mind the connectivity and decoding features of your amplifier. If it's an older model that doesn't have HDMI inputs then you'll need a BD player with multichannel analogue audio outputs to enjoy hi-res surround sound formats. Most current AVRs have HDMI inputs that accept bitstreamed Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA, but not all receivers can cope with 3D video signals, in which case you'll need a deck with dual HDMI outputs – one for the amp, one for the TV.

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
DMP-BDT310 → £260 Approx



This second-gen 3D deck improves on its BDT300 predecessor thanks to new tricks and a lower asking price. Standout features – alongside the excellent 2D and 3D playback – are Skype functionality, 2D-3D conversion, faster loading times and a revamped GUI that takes usability to the next level. Motion-sensitive controls bring even more to the party.

Tested: Issue 194

For more info visit: www.panasonic.co.uk

AV Receivers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Claimed power	THX	Multi-ch in	HDMI in	HDMI out	3D	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	Networking	Net tuner	Issue	Rating	Comment
Anthem	MRX 700	£2,100	7 x 120W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	195	1 2 3 4 5	Complex set-up, great EQ sound
Arcam	AVR400	£1,700	7 x 90W	+	+	5	1	+	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Beautifully built. Ace analogue audio
Denon	AVR-4311	£2,000	9 x 170W	+	+	6	2	+	+	+	+	+	193	1 2 3 4 5	Polished audio, Airplay streaming
Denon	AVR-1611	£350	7 x 110W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	191	1 2 3 4 5	Uses binding posts. Decent sound
Denon	AVR-2311	£800	7 x 135W	+	+	6	1	+	+	+	+	+	190	1 2 3 4 5	iPod dock but no networking
Denon	AVR-3312	£1,000	7 x 165W	+	+	7	2	+	+	+	+	+	202	1 2 3 4 5	New GUI, AirPlay as standard
Marantz	SR7005	£1,400	7 x 125W	+	+	6	2	+	+	+	+	+	187	1 2 3 4 5	Great home cinema amp
Marantz	NR1602	£550	7 x 50W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	201	1 2 3 4 5	Slimline AVR is forward-thinking
NAD	T 757	£1,500	7 x 60W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	201	1 2 3 4 5	Limited features, but superb sound
Onkyo	TX-NR609	£500	7 x 60W	+	+	6	1	+	+	+	+	+	195	1 2 3 4 5	Comprehensive, stunning performer
NEW ENTRY Onkyo	TX-NR5009	£2,700	9 x 220W	+	+	8	2	+	+	+	+	+	203	1 2 3 4 5	Full-blooded 9-channel powerhouse
Onkyo	TX-SR308	£250	5 x 100W	+	+	3	1	+	+	+	+	+	191	1 2 3 4 5	Under specified and under powered
Pioneer	VSX-520	£300	5 x 130W	+	+	3	1	+	+	+	+	+	191	1 2 3 4 5	Decent sound; spring-clip terminals
Pioneer	SC-LX83	£2,000	7 x 190W	+	+	3	1	+	+	+	+	+	186	1 2 3 4 5	Punchy audio with superb control
Pioneer	VSX-920	£500	7 x 140W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	185	1 2 3 4 5	Cool iPod integration, lacks guts a bit
Pioneer	VSX-2021	£800	7 x 150W	+	+	7	2	+	+	+	+	+	200	1 2 3 4 5	Class-leading control and RoomEQ
Yamaha	RXV-3067	£1,500	7 x 140W	+	+	8	2	+	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Superb and musical reproduction
Yamaha	RXV-367	£200	5 x 120W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	191	1 2 3 4 5	Budget spec and sound to match
Yamaha	RXV-471	£300	5 x 105W	+	+	4	1	+	+	+	+	+	199	1 2 3 4 5	Brilliant sounding entry-level AVR
Yamaha	RXV-1067	£850	7 x 105W	+	+	8	2	+	+	+	+	+	190	1 2 3 4 5	Optimised for cinema. Good connects

Systems



Manufacturer	Model	Price	3D	Claimed power	Configuration	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	HDMI in/out	Component	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
Harman/Kardon	BDS800	£1,100	+	525W	5.1	+	+	0/1	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	Nil by 1080p24. OK performance
LG	HB-965TZ	£600	+	1,100W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	187	1 2 3 4 5	Lovely flat speakers and excellent GUI
Panasonic	SC-BTT775	£400	+	1,000W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	198	1 2 3 4 5	A decent starter system for AV novices
Panasonic	SC-BTT350	£370	+	1,000W	5.1	+	+	0/1	+	+	+	190	1 2 3 4 5	Sonics don't match the versatility
Panasonic	SC-BT320	£400	+	1,000W	5.1	+	+	1/1	+	+	+	187	1 2 3 4 5	Pics are ok but a right pain to use
Panasonic	SC-BTT330	£350	+	1,000W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	200	1 2 3 4 5	Affordable surround sound, old net portal
Samsung	HT-D6750W	£800	+	1,300W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	197	1 2 3 4 5	Claims to be 7.1 but isn't
Samsung	HT-C9950W	£2,000	+	1,000W	7.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	190	1 2 3 4 5	Perfect style match for Samsung's TVs
Samsung	HT-C6730	£600	+	1,330W	7.1	+	+	1/1	+	+	+	187	1 2 3 4 5	Room-filling sonics; wireless rear speakers
Sony	BDV-E370	£500	+	850W	5.1	+	+	0/1	+	+	+	187	1 2 3 4 5	Good sound at low volume; SACD playback
Sony	BDV-E880	£400	+	1,000W	5.1	+	+	2/1	+	+	+	201	1 2 3 4 5	Full of features but average audio

Speakers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Configuration	Front max power	Rear max power	Centre max power	Sub power	bookshelf	Issue	Rating	Comment
Acoustic Energy	Aegis Neo Max	£1,900	7.1	2 x 200W	2 x 170W	120W	200W	surr	199	12345	With 2 x 120W surrounds. An awful lot of speakers for the money
Acoustic Energy	Compact/Neo	£850	6.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	200W	all	201	12345	6.1 system offers solid sonics
Artcoustic	Spitfire	£21,500	7.5	2 x 250W	2 x 250W	250W	250W	no	200	12345	Plus 2 x 150W surrounds. Wall-mountable speakers with might
Bowers & Wilkins	800 Diamond	£22,500	5.1	2 x 500W	2 x 120W	300W	1,000W	no	196	12345	Breathtaking sound, bonkers price
Cambridge Audio	Minx S325	£800	5.1	2 x 75W	2 x 75W	75W	300W	all	195	12345	Extraordinary power for dinky size
Canton	CD 105	£500	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	100W	all	196	12345	Potent but suited to smaller areas
Canton	Vento 800	£6,650	5.1	2 x 140W	2 x 80W	85W	750W	rear	194	12345	Fab definition & fidelity
Canton	125 MX	£400	5.1	n/a	n/a	n/a	140W	all	203	12345	Coherent sound, fiddly connectors
Definitive Technology	Mythos XTR-50	£2,400	3.0	2 x 100W	n/a	100W	n/a	no	202	12345	Wall-mountable flatpanel speakers are a classy solution
Image Audio	IA 8/5/C	£4,000	5.0	2 x 150W	2 x 150W	300W	n/a	no	195	12345	Excellent flat panel speakers
Jamo	S426 HCS3	£560	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 60W	90W	260W	rear	201	12345	Affordable floorstanding array
KEF	T-Series T205	£1,500	5.1	2 x 150W	2 x 100W	150W	250W	no	192	12345	Skinny and stylish. Immersive
KEF	Q Series	£2,400	5.1	2 x 130W	2 x 120W	150W	200W	rear	203	12345	Trickle-down tech reaps rewards
Magnat	Quantum 650	£1,700	5.1	2 x 350W	2 x 180W	180W	270W	rear	198	12345	Potent system at a good price
Monitor Audio	Apex	£2,425	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	200W	500W	rear	190	12345	Luxury styling and performance
Monitor Audio	Gold GX	£7,150	5.1	2 x 200W	2 x 100W	200W	650W	no	202	12345	Gorgeous build and sonics
Paradigm	MilleniaOne	£2,500	5.1	2 x 50W	2 x 50W	50W	300W	all	201	12345	Premium-priced sub/sat package
Pioneer	S71	£2,600	5.1	2 x 130W	2 x 130W	130W	280W	rear	194	12345	Immersive sound. Severe looking
PSB	Image Series	£1,500	5.1	2 x 200W	2 x 150W	150W	150W	rear	199	12345	Look great, sound tasty
Scandyna	Micropod SE/ The Ball	£900	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	60W	all	200	12345	Quirky design married to hi-tech drivers = slick style system
Tannoy	Definition	£8,200	5.0	2 x 400W	2 x 350W	350W	n/a	rear	197	12345	Worth every penny. Bring on the sub
Tannoy	Arena HL 300	£1,850	5.1	2 x 75W	2 x 75W	75W	300W	no	198	12345	High-end sub/sats with style
Tannoy	HTS-101	£500	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	100W	all	203	12345	Solid-sounding surround package
Teufel	Columa 100	£350	5.1	2 x 100W	2 x 100W	100W	100W	no	195	12345	Energetic floorstanders. Ace sub
Teufel	Theatre 200	£800	5.1	2 x 140W	2 x 150W	140W	250W	all	195	12345	Bold sats, sub suffers colouration
Quadral	Chromium 5.1	£2,700	5.1	not given	not given	not given	150W	rear	197	12345	Top quality drivers, nice cabinets
XTZ	99 Series	£2,200	5.1	2 x 550W	2 x 100W	100W	300W	no	193	12345	Big, tunable sound. Mail-order

NEW ENTRY

NEW ENTRY

NEW ENTRY

5.1 CLASSIC HOME CINEMA SPEAKER LAYOUT...

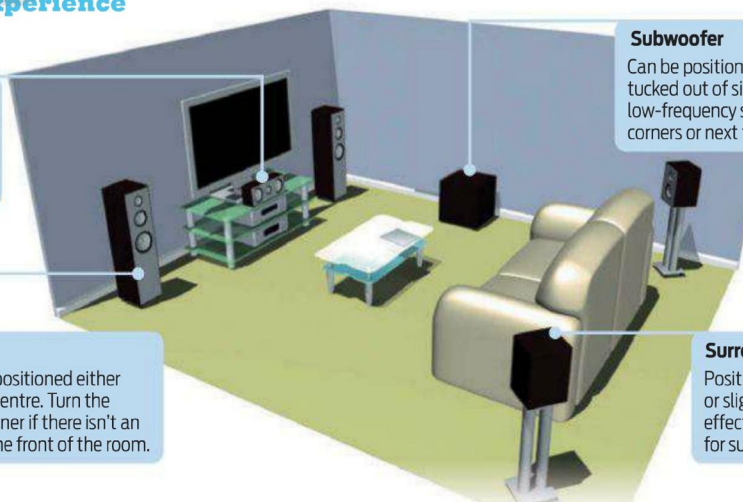
Follow these simple rules when laying out your system and you'll be guaranteed a great listening experience

Centre speaker

Handles most of the dialogue and onscreen effects. Should be positioned above or below the screen as close to it as possible.

Front speakers

Left and right speakers should be positioned either side of the screen, in line with the centre. Turn the speakers in slightly to face the listener if there isn't an even movement of sound across the front of the room.



Subwoofer

Can be positioned wherever it sounds best or can be tucked out of sight due to the non-directional nature of low-frequency signals. Be aware that close positioning in corners or next to walls can create a boomy effect.

Surround speakers

Position alongside the listener, pointing in or slightly behind the ears for a good surround effect. The back wall is not a good position for surrounds.

Projectors



NEW ENTRY

Manufacturer	Model	Price (Original)	Type	Resolution	3D	HDMI	Component	12V trigger	Fan noise/dB	Lamp life/hr	Issue	Rating	Comment
BenQ	W1100	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	22	2,500	197	1 2 3 4 5	Dynamic images, noisy fan
BenQ	W1000+	£750	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	26	5,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Performance transcends price
Casio	XJ-A235	£1,000	DLP	1280 x 800	+	1	0	0	29	20,000	192	1 2 3 4 5	LED/DLP hybrid. Poor pics
Epson	EH-TW3600	£1,300	LCD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	22	4,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Bright pics but average black levels
InFocus	SP8600	£800	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	30	2,500	198	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent sub-£1k projector
InFocus	SP8604	£2,500	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	3	1	2	28	3,000	196	1 2 3 4 5	Versatile PJ with decent pictures
InFocus	SP8602	£3,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	3	3	28	2,500	182	1 2 3 4 5	Good pics with minor operating flaws
JVC	DLA-X3	£3,600	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	20	3,000	193	1 2 3 4 5	Aces 2D images, X-talk with 3D
JVC	DLA-X7	£5,550	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	20	3,000	195	1 2 3 4 5	Brightness and black level to die for
JVC	DLA-HD990	£9,000	D-ILA	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	19	3,000	185	1 2 3 4 5	Gorgeous with amazing black levels
Optoma	HD67N	£500	DLP	1280 x 720	+	1	2	0	29	3,000	194	1 2 3 4 5	With so-so 3D using a 3D-XL adapter
Optoma	HD20	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	1	2	0	29	4,000	176	1 2 3 4 5	One of the first budget Full HD PJs
Optoma	HD83	£2,400	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	2	22	4,000	203	1 2 3 4 5	3D PJ suffers from limited brightness
Panasonic	PT-AE4000	£2,500	LCD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	22	2,000	177	1 2 3 4 5	Filmic pictures and easy to setup
Panasonic	PT-AT5000	£3,200	LCD	1920 x 1080	+	3	1	2	22	4,000	202	1 2 3 4 5	Good connectivity, superb images
Runco	LS-5	£7,500	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	2	2	30	4,000	187	1 2 3 4 5	3-chip performance from one chip
Sanyo	PLV-Z4000	£1,800	LCD	1920 x 1080	+	2	2	1	19	3,000	191	1 2 3 4 5	Quiet. Yellow-ish but filmic images
Sharp	XV-Z17000	£4,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	0	n/a	n/a	196	1 2 3 4 5	Living room friendly, 3D impresses
SIM2	MICO 40	£11,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	2	n/a	30,000	189	1 2 3 4 5	Eco-friendly LED-lit and versatile
SIM2	C3X Lumis Uno	£19,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	3	32	2,500	184	1 2 3 4 5	Supreme pics but lacks manual iris
SIM2	Lumis 3D-S	£30,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	3	n/a	3,000	199	1 2 3 4 5	Reference level 3D projector
Sony	VPL-VW90ES	£5,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	22	n/a	192	1 2 3 4 5	Great option for a 3D CI build
Sony	VPL-VW85	£5,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	20	3,000	174	1 2 3 4 5	Elderly but impressive SXRD PJ
Sony	VPL-HW20	£2,400	SXRD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	0	20	n/a	190	1 2 3 4 5	Complex but capable of greatness
Sony	VPL-HW30ES	£3,100	SXRD	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	0	22	n/a	201	1 2 3 4 5	Sony's most affordable 3D offering
ViewSonic	Pro8200	£900	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	27	3,000	192	1 2 3 4 5	Falters with motion resolution
ViewSonic	Pro8450	£1,500	DLP	1280 x 1200	+	1	1	1	27	4,000	202	1 2 3 4 5	3D-ready business PJ lacks Full HD
Vivitek	H9080FD	£10,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	n/a	4,000	173	1 2 3 4 5	World's first 'lampless' LED projector
Vivitek	H1085	£1,000	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	2	1	1	26	4,000	179	1 2 3 4 5	Affordable DLP PJ could be quieter
Vivitek	H5080	£2,700	DLP	1920 x 1080	+	3	1	2	27	2,000	186	1 2 3 4 5	Excellent contrast and colour. Noisy

PROJECTOR SCREENS EXPLAINED...

FIXED FRAME OR ROLL AWAY?

When buying a projector, it's important to think about what screen you're going to partner it with. There are two main approaches – fixed-frame, where the screen is placed in a rigid frame and attached permanently to the wall, or 'roll-away' where it can be rolled up when not in use, including via neat, motorised systems. For the best picture quality and dedicated cinema rooms, fixed frame is preferable, as permanent screens generally stay more tautly stretched and deliver the most accurate pictures. Roll-away screens are more suited to when the room needs to double as a living room. Pricing, of course, varies depending on what size you need.

Editor's Choice...

SONY

SXRD → VPL-VW90ES
→ £5,400 Approx

Sony's range-topping projector marries an exemplary 2D picture performance with one of the best active shutter 3D systems we've seen. And, aside from its video prowess, it features smart design, solid build and versatile installation options.

Tested: Issue 192
For more info visit: www.sony.co.uk/biz



Media Players



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Type	HDD	3D	HDMI	DLNA	Online portal	USB playback	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
AC Ryan	PlayOn! HD Essential	£130	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	No wired Ethernet option, so you have to network via wi-fi dongle
AC Ryan	PlayOn! HD 2	£150	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	202	1 2 3 4 5	Well featured and a good performer
Boxee	Boxee Box	£200	VOD	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	193	1 2 3 4 5	iPlayer access. Browser is a pain to use
Buffalo	Linkstation Pro LS-VL	£170	NAS	1TB	+	+	+	+	+	+	192	1 2 3 4 5	Speedy and reliable with Bit Torrent client. 1.5TB and 2TB versions are also available
Crystal Acoustics	PICOHD5.1	£50	Player	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	1 2 3 4 5	Small, no frills media player
Crystal Acoustics	Media Matchbox	£55	Player	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	202	1 2 3 4 5	Extensive file support includes lossless audio and BD ISOs. Keenly priced, ultra portable
Digital Stream	DPS-1000	£90	VOD	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	196	1 2 3 4 5	Good for VOD services, no optical out
Iomega	StorCenter IX2-200	£215	NAS	2TB	+	0	+	+	+	+	182	1 2 3 4 5	Pocket-sized powerhouse with handy one-touch USB copy
Iomega	Screenplay MX	£140	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	194	1 2 3 4 5	No optical audio out or hi-res audio
iXtreamer	iXtreamer	£150	NAS	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	1 2 3 4 5	Slick player with space for SATA HDD
Netgear	NeoTV 550	£140	Player	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	1 2 3 4 5	Solid offering but file support isn't comprehensive
Netgear	ReadyNAS NVX	£500	NAS	1TB	+	0	+	+	+	+	185	1 2 3 4 5	Tank-like NAS can accommodate up to 8TB of storage – a serious bit of hardware
Popbox	Popbox 3D	£140	Player	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	199	1 2 3 4 5	Offers BBC iPlayer and MKV3D file support
Sony	SMP-N100	£120	VOD	+	+	1	+	+	+	+	193	1 2 3 4 5	Bravia Internet TV and streaming aplenty
Synology	USB Station 2	£85	Player	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	193	1 2 3 4 5	Simply add your own USB hard disks
Synology	DS410	£400	Player	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	190	1 2 3 4 5	Accommodates up to 8TB of SATA drives
Teufel	MediaStation 6	£270	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	200	1 2 3 4 5	Freeview HD totting player has hideous UI
Toshiba	Stor.E TV+	£170	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	195	1 2 3 4 5	Tosh's cute unit supports a wide range of formats
Verbatim	MediaShare	£130	NAS	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	188	1 2 3 4 5	Stylish, well-featured NAS
WD	WD TV Live Hub	£200	Player	1TB	+	1	+	+	+	+	190	1 2 3 4 5	Superb multi-format player
WD	WD TV Mini	£48	Player	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	189	1 2 3 4 5	Tiny media player lacks HDMI output

HOME CINEMA Choice

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→ In the next issue

CES 2012 exposed The tech, trends and gossip from the world's largest AV show
Super Audio CD Why the hi-res music format just won't die...
Hammer Time! Classic British horror movies get the Blu-ray treatment

→ On test

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Recorders



Manufacturer	Model	Price (*plus subscription)	Type	HDD/GB	HDMI	Component	Scart	USB Media	Online portal	Wi-fi ready	Issue	Rating	Comment
Panasonic	DMR-PWT500	£400	F'view HD	320	1	0	0	+	+	+	202	12345	BD/PVR combi needs bigger HDD
Echostar	HDS-600RS	£350	F'sat HD	500	1	0	2	+	+	+	196	12345	Solid PVR with built-in SlingPlayer feature
Panasonic	DMR-BWT700	£500	F'view HD	320	1	0	1	+	+	+	197	12345	Complex with Blu-ray recorder and 3D player
Sagemcom	DTR67320T	£150	F'view	320	1	1	2	+	+	+	201	12345	No HD tuners, but can import/export media
Samsung	SMT-S7800	£280	F'sat HD	500	1	0	2	+	+	+	197	12345	Good recorder, scant internet TV offering
Samsung	BD-DT7800	£280	F'view HD	500	1	1	0	+	+	+	201	12345	Can't record two channels at once
Toshiba	HDR5010	£200	F'view HD	500	3	1	1	+	+	+	201	12345	Good twin-tuner offering, but no iPlayer yet
TVonics	DTR-Z500HD	£225	F'view HD	500	3	0	1	+	+	+	201	12345	Firmware has added BBC iPlayer
Virgin Media	TiVo	£200*	Cable TV	1TB	1	0	1	+	+	+	195	12345	Awesome 3-tuner PVR. No BBC red button

Subwoofers



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Sealed/ported	Power (RMS)	Frequency response/Hz	Driver size	Dimensions/ (w x h x d)mm	Weight/kg	Issue	Rating	Comment
BK Electronics	XXLS400DF	£410	S	400W	19-120	12in	400 x 460 x 400	28	196	12345	Clean and tight; great value
Bowers & Wilkins	DB1	£3,250	S	1,000W	17-45	12in x 2	460 x 490 x 410	44	197	12345	Bipolar arrangement, ripping
Paradigm	Seismic 110	£1,250	S	850W	18-150	10in	298 x 343 x 320	17	188	12345	AKA The Bulldog and has real bite
Paradigm	SUB1	£5,000	S	1,700W	35-150	8in x 6	505 x 516 x 455	50	197	12345	Unorthodox hexagonal shape
REL	T3	£430	S	150W	30-120	8in	300 x 343 x 356	13	186	12345	Amazing sound for compact size
SV Sound	PC 12 Plus DSP	£1,250	P	800W	10-150	12.5in	1,022 x 407	39	198	12345	Cylindrical sub for big spaces
Velodyne	DD18+	£5,800	S	1,250W	8.8-300	18in	530 x 580 x 650	65	197	12345	Huge 18in driver, muscular sound
Velodyne	SPL-800 Ultra	£1,150	S	1,200W	16-240	8in	267 x 280 x 356	33	201	12345	Compact but potent; nice finish
Wharfedale	SPC-10	£300	S	215W	35-120	10in	352 x 382 x 305	11	202	12345	Affordable, but lacks grunt

Soundbars



Manufacturer	Model	Price	Power	Separate sub	Sub power	HDMI in	HDMI out	Dolby True HD	DTS HD MA	Dimensions/ (w x h x d)mm	Weight/kg	Issue	Rating	Comment
Lenco	SB-100	£140	80W	+	N/A	0	0	+	+	540 x 110 x 165	1.4	199	12345	Budget, but '3D' effect is good
Orbitsound	T12	£300	80W	+	20W	0	0	+	+	605 x 100 x 110	2.8	186	12345	Offers integrated iPod dock
Panasonic	SC-HTB520	£300	120W	+	120W	1	1	+	+	1002 x 80 x 50	2.5	199	12345	HDMI but no TrueHD/DTS-HD
Samsung	HWC450	£250	160W	+	120W	0	0	+	+	957 x 92 x 46	2.3	182	12345	Affordable, has wireless sub
Teufel	Cinebar 50	£670	200W	+	150W	0	0	+	+	1010 x 130 x 100	8	182	12345	Punchy sound but not cheap
Yamaha	YSP-2200	£800	132W	+	100W	3	1	+	+	435 x 137 x 350	6	196	12345	Effective surround sound

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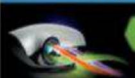
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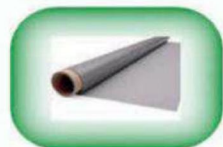
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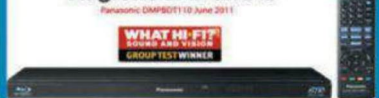


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POINT OF VIEW

Would spending a million quid on a cinema system be worth it in performance terms? **Richard Stevenson** hopes he gets the chance to find out

I have been pondering the high-end of AV recently, mostly why I can't afford it, of course. But events have made me wonder at precisely what price reality ends and opulent lunacy begins. I have a horrible feeling it is about a tenner.

For most of us the question of how much to spend on a system is a simple balance between the relative merits of the entertainment it delivers compared to, say, taking the kids on holiday, buying a new car or fixing the roof. As I don't have kids, the car is fine and I spent all last weekend up a ladder with three tubes of sealant, **I recently purchased a pair of Primare's outstanding A32 power amps... purely to bi-amp my Dolby/DSX Height channels.** My bank manager intimated I had strayed into lunatic territory, opulent or otherwise.

The following week I realised that wasn't the case at all. With my consulting hat on, I sat in a room debating a new finish on some already extremely expensive high-end loudspeakers. Should it be the Ferrari red and carbon weave wrap or the yacht-inspired pearlescent white with polished hardwood veneer and chrome trim? Either one would add the price of a decent family saloon to a pair of speakers that already cost a Porsche Boxster-S. They were not going to sound one jot different from the wood- and dark grey-finished originals, making this a £20,000 non-upgrade. That makes my height-channel set-up look sensible!

With AV kit there is a fairly finite point of peak performance. Beyond this point the extra work, extra materials and extra engineering of ultra-high-end products tends to deliver subtle changes in performance rather than authoritative improvements. I'll stick my neck out here and say the peak performance point for a system comprising processor, power amps and a 5.1 channel speaker system is about £30,000.

So why do people around the world spend more than that on their system? In some cases twice that on just a single pair of red and carbon-black speakers. It comes down to pride of ownership. Either one's own intrinsic pride or, rather more shallow, the pride one feels showing off one's material goodies to friends and colleagues. Either way, the high-end of AV and Hi-Fi has to deliver that sense of pride of ownership in equal, or even greater, measure to delivering performance. This is why amps and speakers in this category are huge, heavy, outrageous-looking and finished with veneers hand-rolled on a maiden's thigh.

But I love it. Should those six little numbers come up on a Saturday night I would be first in line for 22 Krell 900e monoblocks to bi-amp an 11-channel array of Focal Grand Utopias. And just how many Paradigm SUB2s would be considered 'too many'? I don't know but I would have a damn good go at finding out. Add in lots of exotic cabling made from rare-earth metals mined by lost Inca tribesman, and I would be a proverbial pig in poop.

So having binned my first million before the following week's lottery draw, in absolute performance terms how much better would movies sound through this system than the current set up? Er, a bit, but not exactly life-changingly dramatic. Certainly nothing like a million quid's worth, which I could otherwise use to save a local school, set up a hospice for AV-holics or, most likely, buy a yacht.

So all this pondering brings me back to the beginning and finding that magic figure where the cinematic performance-to-cost ratio is at its absolute maximum. I toyed with many different systems and configurations before concluding that the answer is an adult ticket for one at CineWorld: £8.80 plus a cheeky coke. Hey-ho

How much would you spend on your home cinema habit? Email letters@homecinemachoice.com and let us know

Richard Stevenson has agreed to write this column even if he does win the lottery. We suspect he'll pay a ghost writer, though



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